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**Beautiful beings : the function of the reprobate in the philosophical theology of Jonathan Edwards**

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# Beautiful Beings: The Function of the Reprobate in the Philosophical-Theology of Jonathan Edwards

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Theology and Religious Studies  
of King's College, the University of London,  
In Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Since the publication of Sang Hyun Lee's influential book, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (1988), a number of scholars have given considerable attention to the possibilities of understanding various aspects as well as the whole of Jonathan Edwards' (1703-58) thought in terms of dispositional laws, forces, and habits. To be sure, Lee's work has made an important and, what promises to be, lasting contribution toward understanding—in a more systematic way—the micro and macro levels of Edwards' philosophical-theology.

However, some scholars reject the notion of a dispositional ontology in Edwards, while others have taken the concept of disposition in Edwards' thought well beyond the usage the Northampton minister ever indicated or would have intended. Indeed, Anri Morimoto, Gerald McDermott, and even Lee himself, at different times and in different ways, present concepts of disposition and conclusions drawn from them that hardly would have been recognized, let alone owned, by Edwards.

Meanwhile, the surging interest in Edwards studies (prompted by a recent edition of his works) by many scholars attracted to his enduring contributions to divinity, philosophy, and ethics, but who are rather unsympathetic to his particularistic Calvinist theology, has resulted in either revisionist work on his views of unregenerate humanity or a partial or total repudiation of his theological appraisal of the 'reprobate'. Thus, on the one hand, there are those who see Edwards' doctrine of the reprobate as barbaric, archaic, unsophisticated, and unaccommodating: there being no useful or constructive element in his thought concerning those he referred to as 'devils', 'fuel for [hell-]fire,' 'adamant stones,' and 'wholly useless, *except* in their damnation.' (The reprobate includes all persons from non-evangelical Protestant religions who die 'outside of Christ'.) While on the other hand, there are those who, in their overstated applications of Edwards' dispositional ontology, claim that Edwards was moving toward a soteriological perspective that was 'inclusivistic'. They say that, in the last two decades of his life, Edwards was developing a moralistic view of salvation for not only non-evangelical Christian sects, but also non-Christian religions and even non-religious 'moral' persons.

The dissertation under consideration bridges the polarity of the aforementioned positions within the context of Edwards' overarching principle for interpreting reality, namely, relating all things to God's purpose of self-glorification. It argues that Edwards indeed employed disposition(s) in his philosophy, but that his theocentrism, theological tradition, and Calvinist particularism established its boundaries. Moreover, it contends that while his theological assessment of the reprobate was for the most part denunciatory, yet the logic of dispositions in his aesthetic ontology and its consequent epistemology prescribed inherent value and a positive functional role for all intelligent beings—including *the reprobate*—in God's program of self-glorification within the spatiotemporal realm and, in accord with his particularistic theological persuasion, the eternal life hereafter.

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## ***Outline***

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### *Composition Notes, Short Titles and Abbreviations*

Jonathan Edwards did not exclude himself from the routine seventeen and eighteenth-century practice of crafting literary titles so as to include the thesis to be proposed and/or refuted. As a result, most published works contained titles of significant length. For example, the full title of what is commonly referred to as *Freedom of the Will* actually is *A Careful and Strict Enquiry into The modern prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will, Which is supposed to be essential to Moral Agency, Vertue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame*. For the purpose of brevity, then, short titles for Edwards' works, some of his contemporaries, and earlier Puritan titles appear throughout these pages. Short titles are applied to the most frequently cited secondary sources as well, while abbreviations are added to distinguish works with similar names. This should help to make usage of the footnotes more efficient. A list of abbreviated titles, distinguished in the first instance within the text by the author's last name (this excludes Edwards), may be found below.

It should also be noted that Edwards developed a personalized system of abbreviations and shorthand to accommodate not only the rapidity of his thought but, more importantly, to conserve paper – a rare and expensive commodity in the Colony. Thus, within Edwards' unpublished written corpus God is 'G', the Lord Jesus Christ is 'L.J.X.', himself is 'hf', the world is '•', and so on. To enhance readability, I have taken the liberty to edit most of the unpublished material reproduced in these pages by expanding abbreviations to full words, correcting his generally good spelling, and supplementing his scarce punctuation. The English spelling within the pages that follow and the corrections to Edwards' occasionally erroneous spelling correspond to the *American Heritage Dictionary* (English U.S.). Unedited quotes from Edwards, however, retain their original spellings. I have made every effort in my editing to remain faithful to the Yale Editorial standards printed in *Sermons and Discourses, 1720-1723, Vol. 10 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, edited by Wilson H. Kimnach (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992), xi-xiv.

Due to the frequency in which Edwards' philosophical and theological notebooks the 'Miscellanies' are cited, I have abbreviated 'Miscellanies' to simply 'M' followed by the entry number (e.g., 'M'4; or for multiple entries 'M'4, 5, etc.). For the remaining 400 plus unpublished 'Miscellanies', I have relied on the numerical designation and transcriptions of Thomas A. Schafer of McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, courtesy of Professor Schafer and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. These 'Miscellanies' are distinguished by '[TS, Beinecke]'. Regarding the majority of unpublished sermon MSS, my citations include Biblical text and (where possible) the approximate year of composition. Published sermons will be indicated by their published title and (usually) date of composition. All MSS found within these pages are from The Jonathan Edwards Collection retained at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, unless stated otherwise. The sermon transcriptions used in this dissertation are the yield of numerous transcribers and editors of the Yale University Press Jonathan Edwards Project, courtesy of Kenneth P. Minkema (Executive Editor) and the Beinecke Library.

Where multiple treatises are represented in a single Yale volume (for example, *Vol. 8 Ethical Writings* contains *Charity and Its Fruits*, *End of Creation*, and *The Nature of True Virtue*) I will usually distinguish which work I refer to in the footnotes by way of abbreviated treatise titles (see *Abbreviated/Short Titles for Primary Texts* listed below).



A final word on footnote citations: only obscure primary sources are cited in full. All remaining citations (including unpublished dissertations) record author, title, and vol./page number(s). Full citations are preserved in the Bibliography.

<i>Short Titles/Abbreviations</i>	<i>Full Titles</i>
<i>Limits of Enlightenment</i>	Chai, Leon. <i>Jonathan Edwards and the Limits of Enlightenment Philosophy</i> . New York and Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, 1998.
<i>Reappraisal</i>	Cherry, Conrad. <i>The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal</i> Bloomington, IN., Indiana Univ. Press, 1966.
<i>Beauty and Sensibility</i>	Delattre, Roland A. <i>Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards</i> . New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1968.
<i>PTJE</i>	Elwood, Douglas J. <i>The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards</i> . New York, Columbia University Press, 1960.
<i>Moral Thought</i>	Fiering, Norman S. <i>Jonathan Edwards' Moral Thought in its British Context</i> . Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1981.
<i>Rational Biblical</i>	Gerstner, John H. <i>The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards</i> . 3 vols. Powhatan, VA, Berea, 1991-93.
<i>Edwards in Our Time</i>	Guelzo, Allen C. and Lee, Sang Hyun, (Eds.) <i>Edwards in Our Time: Jonathan Edwards and the Shaping of American Religion</i> . Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1999.
<i>American Experience</i>	Hatch, Nathan O. and Stout, Harry S., (Eds.) <i>Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience</i> . New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988.
<i>Ethics of JE</i>	Holbrook, Clyde A. <i>The Ethics of Jonathan Edwards: Morality and Aesthetics</i> . Ann Arbor, Univ. of Michigan Press, 1973.
<i>God of Grace</i>	Holmes, Stephen R. <i>God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards</i> . Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 2000.
<i>America's Theologian</i>	Jenson, Robert W. <i>America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards</i> . Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988.
<i>Philosophical Theology</i>	Lee, Sang H. <i>The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards: The Idea of Habit and Edwards' Dynamic Vision of Reality</i> . Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1988, 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed. 2000.
<i>Encounters</i>	McClymond, Michael J. <i>Encounters with God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards</i> . Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998.
<i>Confronts the Gods</i>	McDermott, Gerald R. <i>Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths</i> . Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000.



<i>Jonathan Edwards</i>	Miller, Perry. <i>Jonathan Edwards</i> . Men of American Letters Series. New York, William Sloane, 1949.
‘The Edwardses’	Minkema, Kenneth P. ‘The Edwardses: A Ministerial Family in Eighteenth-Century New England.’ Ph.D. dissertation, Univ. of Connecticut, 1988.
<i>Catholic Vision</i>	Morimoto, Anri. <i>Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation</i> . University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995.
<i>New Biography</i>	Murray, Iain H. <i>Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography</i> . Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1987.
<i>JE’s Writings</i>	Stein, Stephen J. (Ed.), <i>Jonathan Edwards’s Writings: Text, Context, Interpretation</i> . Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1996.

### Short Titles/Abbreviations for Primary Texts

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#### Jonathan Edwards:

<i>Works1</i>	<i>Freedom of the Will. Vol. 1 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards</i> . Edited by Paul Ramsey. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1957.
<i>Works2</i>	<i>Religious Affections. Vol. 2 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards</i> . Edited by John E. Smith. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1959.
<i>Works3</i>	<i>Original Sin. Vol. 3 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards</i> . Edited by Clyde A. Holbrook. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1970.
<i>Works4</i>	<i>The Great Awakening. Vol. 4 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards</i> . Edited by C.C. Goen. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1972.
<i>Works5</i>	<i>Apocalyptic Writings. Vol. 5 of the Works of Jonathan Edwards</i> . Edited by Stephen J. Stein. New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1977.
<i>Works6</i>	<i>Scientific and Philosophical Writings. Vol. 6 of the Works of Jonathan Edwards</i> . Edited by Wallace E. Anderson. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1980.
<i>Works7</i>	<i>The Life of David Brainerd. Vol. 7 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards</i> . Edited by Norman Pettit. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985.
<i>Works8</i>	<i>Ethical Writings. Vol. 8 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards</i> . Edited by Paul Ramsey. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989.
<i>Works9</i>	<i>A History of the Work of Redemption. Vol. 9 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards</i> . Edited by John F. Wilson. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989.



<i>Works10</i>	<i>Sermons and Discourses, 1720-1723. Vol. 10 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards.</i> Edited by Wilson H. Kimnach. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992.
<i>Works11</i>	<i>Typological Writings. Vol. 11 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards.</i> Edited by Wallace E. Anderson, Mason I. Lowance, and David H. Watters. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993.
<i>Works12</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical Writings. Vol. 12 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards.</i> Edited by David D. Hall. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994.
<i>Works13</i>	<i>The "Miscellanies" (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500). Vol. 13 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards</i> Edited by Thomas A. Schafer. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994.
<i>Works14</i>	<i>Sermons and Discourses, 1723-1729. Vol. 14 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards.</i> Edited by Kenneth P. Minkema. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997.
<i>Works15</i>	<i>Notes on Scripture. Vol. 15 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards.</i> Edited by Stephen J. Stein. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998.
<i>Works16</i>	<i>Letters and Personal Writings. Vol. 16 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards.</i> Edited by George S. Claghorn. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998.
<i>Works17</i>	<i>Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733. Vol. 17 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards.</i> Edited by Mark Valeri. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1999.
<i>Works18</i>	<i>The "Miscellanies" (Entry Nos. 501-832). Vol. 18 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards.</i> Edited by Ava Chamberlain. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000.
<i>Works19</i>	<i>Sermons and Discourses, 1734-1738. Vol. 19 of The Works of Jonathan Edwards.</i> Edited by M. X. Lesser. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001.
<i>Worcester-Works</i>	<i>The Works of President Edwards.</i> 8 vols. Edited by Samuel Austin. Worcester, MA, Isaiah Thomas, 1808-09.
<i>Banner-Works</i>	<i>The Works of Jonathan Edwards.</i> With a Memoir by Sereno E. Dwight. Revised by Edward Hickman. 2 vols. Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974 reprint [1992].
<i>Dwight-Works</i>	<i>The Works of President Edwards with a Memoir of His Life.</i> 10 vols. New York, Converse, 1829-30.
<i>Sermon Outlines</i>	<i>Jonathan Edwards' Sermon Outlines.</i> Edited by Sheldon B. Quincer. London, Pickering & Inglis, 1958.
<i>Select Sermons</i>	<i>Selected Sermons of Jonathan Edwards.</i> Edited by Norman Gardiner. New York, 1904.



<i>Treatise</i>	Helm, Paul. (Ed.) <i>Treatise on Grace and other Posthumously Published Writings</i> . Cambridge and London, James Clark & Co., 1971.
<i>PJE</i>	Townsend, Harvey G. <i>The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards from His Private Notebooks</i> . Eugene, University of Oregon Press, 1955.
<i>‘EI’</i>	‘Editor’s Introduction’
<i>FW</i>	<i>Freedom of the Will</i>
<i>RA</i>	<i>Religious Affections</i>
<i>OS</i>	<i>Original Sin</i>
<i>FN</i>	<i>Faithful Narrative</i>
<i>DM</i>	<i>Distinguishing Marks</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival</i>
<i>Charity</i>	<i>Charity and Its Fruits</i>
<i>EofC</i>	<i>End of Creation</i>
<i>TV</i>	<i>True Virtue</i>
<i>HWR</i>	<i>A History of the Work of Redemption</i>
<i>TM</i>	<i>Types of the Messiah</i>
<i>PN</i>	<i>Personal Narrative</i>
 <u><i>Other Primary Texts:</i></u>	
<i>Institutes</i>	Calvin, John. <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> , The Library of Christian Classics XX-XXI, ed. John T. McNeill, London, SCM Press, 1961.
<i>Meditations</i>	Descartes, René. <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> (1641) in <i>The Philosophical Works of Descartes</i> . ET Elizabeth S. Haldane ad G.R.T. Ross. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1911.
<i>An Inquiry</i>	Hutcheson, Francis. <i>An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Virtue</i> . Edinburgh, 1725.
<i>WA</i>	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe (WA)</i> , 58 vols., Weimar, Bohlau, 1833 -.
<i>Workes Perkins</i>	Perkins, William. <i>The Wworkes of that Famous and Wworthy Minister of Christ in the Vniversitie of Cambridge, M. William Perkins...</i> , 3 vols. London, 1612, 1613, 1631 respectively.
<i>Treatise Concerning Conversion</i>	Stoddard, Solomon. <i>A Treatise Concerning Conversion: Shewing the Nature of Saving Conversion To God, and the Way wherein it is wrought; Together with an Exhortation to Labour after it</i> . Boston, 1719.
<i>Institutes</i>	Turretin, François. <i>Institutes of Elenctic Theology</i> [ <i>Institutio Theologiae Elencticae</i> , 1679-85]. ET George M. Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. 3 vols. Phillipsburg, NJ, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992-1997.
<i>Theoretico-Practica</i>	Van Mastricht, Petrus. <i>Theoretico-Practica Theologia qua per Singula Capita Theologia, pars Exegetica, Dogmatica, Elenctica et Practica, Perpetua Successione Conjugantur</i> . ed. nova. Thomæ Appels, Rhenum, 1699.



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Anyone who has embarked upon a thesis project such as this soon learns, as I have, that the novelty of writing a doctoral dissertation quickly fades, while the help of others becomes proportionately greater. Yet this dependence upon others for resources, hospitality, conversation, and criticism, so far from being an encumbrance, remains the leading pleasure of such a project. This aspect of postgraduate research leaves as its welcomed legacy professional acquaintances, friendships, and fond memories. In this respect, the work undertaken here is no different from all that have gone before it in the expanding sphere of Edwards studies – it too carries with it a role of worthies, lasting relationships, and memorable seasons.

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CHRISTIAN RELIGION ... God has communication with or influence upon all other creatures according to their nature, upon bodies according to the nature and capacity of body; and how unreasonable is it to suppose that He holds no communication with [intelligent perceiving] spirits according to their *nature* and *capacity*!

— Jonathan Edwards, ‘*Miscellanies*’ 204



## Introduction

As the tercentennial anniversary of the birth of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) approaches, one may expect the recent profusion of articles, books, and dissertations on the Colonial American Congregational preacher and theologian to reach a feverish pitch. This interest in Edwards, initiated by Perry Miller's 1949 intellectual biography and which has produced literally thousands of secondary sources, has made this Puritan minister, once banished from his own church in Northampton to serve as a missionary to Indians on the Massachusetts Frontier, a twentieth- and twenty-first-century intellectual and religious phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

Aside from the early efforts of Perry Miller, H. Richard Niebuhr, and Sydney Ahlstrom, scholarly interest in Edwards continues through the celebrated Yale University Press edition of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (19 vols., New Haven, 1957-). Although older editions of Edwards' works continue to circulate, yet the Yale letterpress edition is distinguished by its incorporation of previously unpublished original manuscripts, and a critical introductory essay in each volume. In addition to providing a more complete and holistic understanding of his thought and influence, another value of these influential essays is their contribution to correcting the hagiographical bias and defective caricaturing of Edwards, which at times has been endemic to Edwardsean scholarship and literature.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, despite these and other notable and balanced scholarly efforts, dark clouds still shroud Edwards' intellectual legacy. This is due in no small part to his uncompromising retention of the more ominous doctrines of Calvinism: total depravity, inherent corruption,

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<sup>1</sup> Miller's *Jonathan Edwards*, though dated, still retains its importance as the only modern intellectual biography of JE. However, George Marsden of the University of Notre Dame is soon to provide a much needed revision. M.X. Lesser estimates that at the present there are well over four thousand secondary sources concerned with JE (*Jonathan Edwards: A Reference Guide*; *Jonathan Edwards: An Annotated Biography, 1979-1993*; cf. Manspeaker, *Jonathan Edwards: Bibliographical Synopses*. In March 2000, The Banner of Truth Trust, a publisher of 'historic Christian literature' in the Calvinist tradition, reported their distribution of 47,793 copies of the reprinted Edward Hickman edition of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* since 1974. By 'religious phenomenon', I loosely mean the growing interest which a number of ministers, laypersons, churches, and religious organizations have in JE as a figure of authority regarding doctrinal matters and religious practices (esp. revivals), evidenced by the profusion of literature produced and consumed on JE, as well as the number of conferences and websites dedicated to the promotion and discussion of his thought and works.

<sup>2</sup> Partisan accounts have characterize JE as a promoter and defender of charismatic revival and gifts of charismata (Guy Chevreau, *Catch the Fire*), as the quintessential Calvinist theologian (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, 'Jonathan Edwards and the Crucial Importance of Revival', *The Puritans: Their Origins and Their Successors*), as proto-Barthian (Conrad Cherry, *Reappraisal*), and as a Reformed 'classical' apologist *par excellence* and 'Common Sense' philosopher (Gerstner, *Rational Biblical*), among other things. He also has been misrepresented as a prodigy child of unprecedented genius (Henry Rogers, 'Essay on His Genius and Writings' in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, A.M.* [Hickman edition] 1:xii; and Edward H. Davidson, *Jonathan Edwards: The Narrative of a Puritan Mind*), as a nearly faultless example of Puritan piety and Christian devotion (Murray, *New Biography*), as a postmodern philosophical-theologian(!) in Sephen H. Daniel, *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards: A Study in Divine Semiotics*, and as the minatorial sermonizer frightening children and relishing in thoughts of an unbelieving child's damnation (Philip Greven, *Spare the Child*, 57; and Joseph Crooker, 'Jonathan Edwards: A Psychological Study', 159-72).



‘limited atonement’, irresistible grace, and eternal perdition.<sup>3</sup> For many, the first two doctrines translate into a sinister and pessimistic doctrine of human beings, the next two bespeak of antiquated religious particularism (i.e. that spiritual ‘salvation’ is found in Jesus Christ *alone*) and a fatalistic violation of freedom, while the last term captures the frightful predestinated consequences of the non-elect by a hateful deity—endless and irremediable torment in hell.<sup>4</sup>

The theological worldview framed by these doctrines asserts that, outside of the elect portion of the human race, the rest of humanity (i.e. ‘natural-men’<sup>5</sup> or ‘reprobates’, who were, according to Edwards, ‘ruined by the fall’) are left to ‘perish, and burn in hell forever.’<sup>6</sup> These were cardinal doctrines of Edwards’ particularist soteriological and eschatological perspective – a perspective that he vigorously promoted as truth from God.

Edwards claims that from the time of his conversion (1721), his first opinion of these ‘truths’ completely changed. Describing his view of predestinarian theology prior to his conversion experience he said, ‘From my childhood up, my mind had been wont to be full of objections against the doctrine of God’s sovereignty, in choosing whom he would to eternal life, and rejecting whom he pleased; leaving them eternally to perish and be everlastingly tormented in hell. It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me.’ But upon his conversion there occurred ‘a wonderful alteration in my mind.’ He came not only to have a ‘*delightful* conviction’ about God’s sovereignty in double particular election, but ‘a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation.’ Edwards ‘saw’ God not only in the gospel of Jesus Christ, but *in everything*: ‘the appearance of everything was altered ... God’s excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon and stars ... and all nature.’<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I am not here referring to the famous ‘five points’ of Calvinism formulated at the Synod of Dort (Dortrecht, Netherlands), which convened from 13 November 1618 to 29 May 1619.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that in the ‘Preface’ to his treatise *FW*, JE distinguishes himself as something other than a disciple of John Calvin by saying, ‘I utterly disclaim a dependence on Calvin, or believing the doctrines which I hold, because he believed and taught them’ (*Works*1, 131): JE believing that his theology emerged from careful study of the Bible, not the *Institutes*. To be sure, on occasion the differences between Calvin and JE are considerable and numerous. Yet, despite this caveat in his ‘Preface’, JE had no problem subscribing to the *Westminster Confession* and the *Savoy Declaration*.

<sup>5</sup> Because ‘natural man’ can mean ‘man’ as he was originally created, man in his natural state, or the unregenerate posterity of Adam, the latter will be designated ‘natural-man’ to avoid confusion and retain JE’s meaning in ‘M’683, where he says, ‘unregenerate men are called natural because they have nothing but nature’ (*Works*18, 246). Prior to regeneration, the elect are ‘natural-men’. Theologically, reprobates are those persons on the negative side of predestination. The doctrine of reprobation or preterition teaches that God, according to His sovereign will, ‘passes over’ some sinners in the bestowment of regenerating (special) grace, thereby leaving them in their sinful ‘disqualification’, and, at last, God condemns them for their moral corruption. JE’s doctrine of reprobation is notably stronger than this. Of the three general categories of predestination (single particular election, double particular election, and general election) he holds to ‘double particular election,’ which asserts that God has a positive elective purpose to damn certain individuals. See MS sermon on Rev. 14:15 (c.1743-44).

<sup>6</sup> ‘Sermon One’, *Works*9, 124; ‘The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners’(c.1736), *Banner-Works*, 1:672.

<sup>7</sup> *PN*, *Works*16, 791-94.



He attributed this aesthetic and theocentric vision of reality to a ‘new spiritual sense’. Not simply an intellectual apprehension of divine things, or just an emotional sensitivity to religious discourse or phenomena, the ‘new spiritual sense’ is a mystical yet coherent conjunction of the cognitive and affectional faculties that perceives communicated spiritual/moral ideas from God about reality. The sense, however, is neither fleeting nor occasional. Instead, it is a disposition ‘infused’ at regeneration that facilitates a progressive reorientation of one’s thoughts, affections, and perspective on reality in the light of ‘true religion’.<sup>8</sup> And ‘true religion’, as Edwards testified in his *Personal Narrative*, is about ‘sensing’ God and His glory and beauty ‘in everything’. Through the spiritual sense one ‘sees’ God’s self-glorifying designs and purposes present at the center of ‘everything’: creation, history, and even nature.

This radical change in perspective meant that not even salvation is primarily about human beings; it is mostly about God. Indeed, *all* of God’s dealings with human beings revolve around the ‘end of creation’, which is God’s self-glorification through self-communication. This idea lies at the heart of Edwards’ theocentric worldview. Thus, for him, the history of the world is the narrative of divine glorification,<sup>9</sup> where God ‘disposes with His creatures as He sees fit.’ And if God determines to save a *particular* remnant and burn the rest in hell (who deserve it anyway), then we are to resolve ourselves to His will, for ‘His will and pleasure are of infinitely more importance than the will of creatures.’<sup>10</sup> For Edwards, these principles are not only the testimony of revelation, but ‘most reasonable’ and therefore ‘exceedingly pleasant’.<sup>11</sup>

Such a perspective on humanity, indeed, on world history, was precisely what Enlightenment religion did *not* represent.<sup>12</sup> As Gerald R. McDermott explains, ‘John Toland, Matthew Tindal, and other deists focused on the problem of particularity,<sup>13</sup> which in their case meant the realization that only one-sixth of the world had heard the gospel ... and that according to Calvinism the other five-sixths were damned. This threatened traditional notions of God’s goodness and justice and led deists to reshape God and religion in ways that undermined both Catholic and Protestant understandings of revelation.’<sup>14</sup> Thus, instead of special revelation (the Bible) only being given to a *particular* group for their salvation (viz. ‘the covenant people of God’ – Jews and Christians), God’s goodness and justice were in his

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<sup>8</sup> ‘M’l, *Works*13, 168-69.

<sup>9</sup> *EofC*, *Works*8, 419-35.

<sup>10</sup> ‘The Sole Consideration, that God is God, Sufficient to Still All Objections to His Sovereignty’ (1735), *Banner-Works*, 2:108.

<sup>11</sup> ‘All God’s Methods Are Most Reasonable’ (c.1727), *Works*14, 165-97.

<sup>12</sup> By ‘Enlightenment religion’ I mean more particularly deistic religion, but also the religious perspectives tethered to moral naturalism. My use of this term ‘Enlightenment religion’ acknowledges that there were distinctively Christian Enlightenment movements (one thinks of brand of Christian theology wed to Scottish Common Sense Philosophy, for example), but will be used throughout the following pages in the aforementioned ‘deistic’ or ‘naturalistic’ sense.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Particularity’ refers to soteriological ‘restrictivism’ as opposed to universalism or inclusivism.

<sup>14</sup> *Confronts the Gods*, 5.



giving sufficient natural endowments and revelation to all. All human beings were understood to have a fair share in revelation, and were accountable only to live according to its light and natural reason – which any and all religious and moral persons naturally did anyway.<sup>15</sup>

Hence, Enlightenment religion (*contra* Calvinistic particularism) was hallmarked by a particularly *positive* view of human beings *qua* reason – redeemed or unredeemed, Christian or heathen. The history of the world was the drama of human progress and enlightenment. Talk of predestination, particularism, or perdition was decidedly unenlightened.

A hundred years later, Oliver Wendell Holmes, as one who continued in the spirit of Enlightenment religion, could not but see Edwards' worldview (especially his thoughts concerning human beings) as 'polluted' with Calvinist 'barbarism.' Catherine A. Brekus retells the story of Holmes painting a vivid portrait of a stern, grim-faced Edwards telling his son that God despised him. Holmes was repulsed that 'hardhearted Edwards' would promulgate a doctrine which esteemed even his own three-year-old child 'a viper, and worse than a viper.' Holmes could only hope that 'almost celestial Mrs. Jonathan Edwards' would never allow such 'hateful' doctrines to demoralize her children. In order to complete his repudiation of Edwards' thought, he denounced the Puritan's theocentric principles as 'not only false, not only absurd, but also ... *disorganizing forces* in the midst of the thinking apparatus. Edwards's system seems, in the light of today, to the last degree barbaric, mechanical, materialistic, pessimistic.'<sup>16</sup>

Likewise, novelist and critic Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-96) and Unitarian William Ellery Channing (1780-1842) lamented that Edwards had wasted his intellectual abilities defending and promoting Calvinism's 'false theology.'<sup>17</sup> For Holmes, Stowe, and Channing, the 'natural-man' is a person living according to the light of reason and nature and, therefore, ought to be considered a neutral if not positive contributor to spatiotemporal existence. Moreover, they would argue, each and every person has inherent value as a human being, simply because they *are* human beings, religion notwithstanding.

Much of the non-evangelical, late nineteenth- early twentieth-century criticism of Edwards' particularism was even more scathing: Edwards came to embody his 'demented' theology. Reproaching the man sometimes became the same thing as condemning his

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<sup>15</sup> See, Kaakonssen, (Ed.) *Enlightenment and Religion*; Hunter, 'The Problem of "Atheism" in Early Modern England'; Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason* and *The Church in the Age of Reason, 1648-1789*; and also McDermott's excellent overviews of Enlightenment religion and its relation to JE in *Confronts the Gods*, 17-33, 34-51. For a contemporary account see John Leland, *A view of the principal deistical writers*, 2 vols. (London, Printed for B. Dod, et. al., 1754-55), and *A supplement to the first and second volumes of the deistical writers ... [etc.]* (London, B. Dod, et. al. 1756).

<sup>16</sup> Brekus, 'Suffer the Little Children: Remembering Edwards's Ministry to Families', 1-2. Holmes, *Over the Teacups*, 249-50.

<sup>17</sup> Channing, 'Remarks on National Literature', 269-95. Stowe, *The Minister's Wooing*.



theological perspectives. So Edwards sometimes was depicted as mentally deranged, a giftless recluse, an anachronism in his own time, and even a ‘blight upon posterity.’<sup>18</sup>

Even Edwards’ own theological tradition distanced itself from his severe particularism, which included child depravity and infant damnation.<sup>19</sup> Few nineteenth- and twentieth-century Confessional Calvinists, tempered by a humanitarian climate, wanted to preserve Edwards’ uncompromising and pessimistic views concerning infant reprobation and damnation. Their sentimentalist views of childhood and Edwards’ vision of God’s total sovereignty to ‘dispense with his creatures as he pleases’ were simply incompatible.<sup>20</sup>

Recently, however, scholars have begun once again to give analytical attention to Edwards’ worldview. And while *ad hominem* criticism has been exchanged for constructive scholarship, little or nothing positive is said about his assessment of human beings in their relation to God’s self-glorifying purposes in creation and history.<sup>21</sup> The problem continues to be Edwards’ particularism and the negative anthropological assessment associated with it.

Modern-day Edwards scholar Michael J. McClymond finds his present disapproval of Edwards’ assessment of human beings succinctly expressed in Alexander V. G. Allen’s criticism of 1889: ‘The great wrong which Edwards did, which haunts us as an evil dream throughout his writings, was to assert God at the expense of humanity.’ McClymond adds, ‘it is hard to see how God’s proportionate regard [where God regards beings according to their ‘excellency’ and ‘worthiness’] includes a concern for mere mortals. Moreover, there is a

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<sup>18</sup> See Brekus, ‘Suffer the Little Children’. Stephen, ‘Jonathan Edwards’ in *Hours in a Library*, 4:42-102; Parrington, ‘The Anachronism of Jonathan Edwards’ in *Main Currents in American Thought*, 148-63; Parks, *Jonathan Edwards: The Fiery Puritan*, cited in McClymond, *Encounters*, 114 n.7. Evangelical intellectual assessments of JE’s life and worldview continued to be charitable, if not complimentary, yet not entirely uncritical or recommending, particularly at Princeton and upstart Westminster Theological Seminary where JE’s theology continued to have influence. See Nelson, ‘The Rise of the Princeton Theology’; and, Noll, ‘Jonathan Edwards and Nineteenth-Century Theology’ in *American Experience*, 260-87.

<sup>19</sup> In ‘M’n, ‘INFANT DAMNATION’, JE wrote: ‘[I]t is most just, exceedingly just, that God should take the soul of a new-born infant and cast it into eternal torments’ (*Works*13, 169).

<sup>20</sup> Sereno Dwight, in his ten-volume edition of his great-grandfather’s works, edited out many denunciatory passages in order to make JE appear more serene, balanced, and (presumably) enlightened. So, too, Lyman Beecher and others tied to temper JE’s rhetoric and doctrinal statements (see Brekus, ‘Suffer the Little Children’). But the stigma of a hell-fire preacher of infant damnation was, at that time for JE, an irrepressible caricature. Thus, when a wave of optimism regarding universal infant salvation swept through confessional Presbyterianism and Congregationalism, JE’s thoughts on the matter were denounced. Indeed, during the 1880s-1900s, his position became that which conservative Calvinism in the Presbyterian Church in the USA set itself over-against (see Shedd, *Calvinism: Pure & Mixed*, 38-41, 57-68).

<sup>21</sup> Notable exceptions are Sang Lee (see ‘Edwards on God and Nature’ in *Edwards in Our Time*, 15-44), Anri Morimoto (who in *Catholic Vision* argues that JE’s soteriology of ontological transformation is really ‘inclusivistic’, not ‘restrictivistic’), and Gerald R. McDermott (*Confronts the Gods* and ‘A Possibility of Reconciliation’ in *Edwards in Our Time*, 173-202). In *Confronts the Gods*, McDermott presents JE’s high view of ‘reason’ in both fallen and unfallen man. In the end, however, McDermott rightly observes that despite whatever natural abilities an unregenerate person may or may not have, and no matter how much natural revelation they understood, ‘without an infusion of grace, the heathen [unregenerates] were damned’ (222). Of course, there will be a number among the traditionally Reformed who would find JE’s biblical assessment of ‘natural-man’ agreeable.



moral as well as a metaphysical issue, since humans are not only finite but sinful. The morally depraved are not obvious objects for God's proportionate regard.' Consequently, critics conclude that Edwards' particularism despoils his God-centered worldview, depreciates his moral philosophy, and remains without a viable theodicy.<sup>22</sup> According to McClymond and others, Edwards' radically theocentric worldview not only does not but cannot allow for a positive contribution to spiritual, moral, and mental reality by the natural-man or reprobate: for according to Edwards' 'scale of being,' where excellency or substantiality of being is measured by nearness to God, they are 'worthless' and 'as little as nothing.'<sup>23</sup> Obviously, regenerate persons possess relational (ontological) excellence through their union with Christ. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit 'so united to their souls' substantiates their being. They are valuable to God because in and through them God replicates His innertrinitarian perfections. But what 'excellence' could the natural-man and reprobate possibly possess since they are outside of Christ and without the Spirit?

Dr. Stephen Holmes furthers the complexity of this point when he considers Edwards' Trinitarian doctrine of creation. Holmes asks, if, for Edwards, creation is a divine act of *ekstasis*, of the sending of the Son and Spirit by the Father, directed towards a sharing or enlargement of the triune life, then where does this logic of creation leave the non-elect? Holmes concludes that, since they are 'Christless' and 'Spiritless', then the non-elect are in 'the perilous position of lacking true humanity, or indeed true being'.<sup>24</sup>

Edwards' sermons on Daniel 5:25, Ezekiel 15:2-4, and Deuteronomy 32:35 (just to name a few), with doctrines such as 'God's manner of dealing with wicked men that continue in sin first to finish their days and then to bring 'em into judgment and then to destroy 'em', 'Mankind, if they bring forth no fruit to God are wholly useless unless it be in their destruction', and 'There is nothing that keeps wicked men at each moment out of hell but the meer [sic] pleasure of God', seem only to lend credence to the opinion that he regards natural-men and especially reprobates as having absolutely no contributive value or significance in *this* realm other than as extras in God's historical drama of accomplishing and applying salvation to his elect, or perhaps in their amassing sins for their eternal destruction, so that God and His saints could delight in the exercising of His wrathful power.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, in light of

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<sup>22</sup> Allen cited in McClymond, *Encounters*, 63; 50-64. McClymond's criticisms basically are the same as those expressed in the late eighteenth- through nineteenth-centuries (cf. Holbrook, *Ethics of JE*, 113-33). JE has also been the object of discussion by contemporary proponents of 'Open Theism' (a theological movement endorsing the passibility of God, synergism, limited divine foreknowledge, and God's susceptibility to time, among other things). JE's brand of Calvinist particularism/determinism has been a focus of Open Theism's critical repudiation of orthodox Reformed theology and soteriology. See for example, Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 157-60; and Sanders, *No Other Name*, 42-43.

<sup>23</sup> Hos. 5:15[a] (1730), *Works*17, 143; 'M'41, *Works*13, 223.

<sup>24</sup> *God of Grace*, 241-43.

<sup>25</sup> Dan. 5:25 (1741); 'Wicked Men Useful in Their Destruction Only' (1734), 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God' (1741), 'When those that continue in sin shall have filled up the measure of their sin, then wrath will come upon them to the uttermost' (1735), *Banner-Works*, 2:125, 7, 122. Stephen R.



the imprecatory content of not a few of his sermons,<sup>26</sup> one may be prompted to ask, ‘If, in Edwards, I am only “fuel for the fire” after this life, then what function and value do I hold in spatiotemporality? Why did not God glorify Himself by creating me in hell?’ The question could be rephrased to ask, ‘How can the existence of the natural-man and, particularly, the reprobate have contributive, cosmic significance in the world when, for Edwards, they are accounted as worthless?’

John E. Colwell summarizes the impasse in Edwards’ theocentric thought when he writes: ‘Less easy to resolve is the disjunction between themes of beauty and harmony on the one hand, and on the other, the perception that God’s glory demonstrated in the justice of hell and the mercy of heaven. For all the Christocentric anticipations of Barth this disjunction favors of an unnecessary yet central incoherence.’<sup>27</sup>

Is Edwards simply a misanthropist, a ‘theologian of glory’, who, for the sake of God’s glory, relegates reprobates into a sub-human category of fuel for hell-fire? Or, is there some place within his theocentric thought where he ascribes real ‘worth’ and ‘substantiality’ to the existence of natural-men and reprobates?

For anyone familiar with only the most widely-circulated of Edwards’ written works it is an undeniable fact that he vigorously denounced the Enlightenment’s assessment of human nature as basically good (or even self-determining), that he wrote a lengthy defense of ‘the great Christian doctrine of original sin,’ that he believed ‘Christ is the *only* door by which men enter into a state of salvation,’ that he forcefully attacked annihilationism in support of the reality of hell, and that ‘absolute sovereignty’ was what he loved to ascribe to God.<sup>28</sup> In short, there really is no avoiding the fact that he held to a thoroughly uncompromising form of Calvinistic particularism. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that he was a fatalist (a strong determinist, to be sure). Nor can it be said that his thoughts concerning the natural-man were exclusively negative. Instead of only denunciations about the natural-man, Edwards also held a surprisingly positive perspective on the existence and function of natural-man, even ascribing a great deal of significance and value to the reprobate’s life and purpose *in this*

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Holmes suggests that the destruction of reprobates promotes God’s glory by a ‘vision across the chasm,’ where saints rejoice over seeing sinners being justly punished and sinners suffer more from seeing saints in glory. Thus, God is glorified in the saints’ happiness and the reprobates’ misery (*God of Grace*, 213ff).

<sup>26</sup> Norman Fiering suggests that ‘perhaps less than 2 percent’ of JE’s surviving sermons were of the maledictorial type (*Moral Thought*, 204). However, by my estimates there are nearly seventy sermons (or nearly 10 percent; taking into account that many of these sermons were re-preached [v.i. Chapter V, §2.b.iii]) alone that hold for their ‘Doctrine’ meditations on ‘hell torments’, ‘future punishments’, and ‘God’s wrath’ (see Jonathan Edwards Collection ‘General MSS 151’ catalog, Beinecke Library, Yale University). This estimate excludes the hundreds of denunciatory expositions of varying lengths throughout his sermon corpus on ‘wicked men’, ‘man’s nature’, ‘original sin’, ‘inherent corruption’, ‘the Fall’, and other moral theological and anthropological themes.

<sup>27</sup> Colwell, ‘Jonathan Edwards’ in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, gen. ed. Trevor A. Hart, 175.

<sup>28</sup> *FW, Works1; OS, Works3*, title page; John 10:9 (1749); *PN, Works16*, 792. I say this conscious of the efforts of Morimoto and McDermott, whose opinions I contest in Chapter V.



*world*. More than just fuel for the fire or a viper to be destroyed, reprobates were and are both active and vital agents in God's self-glorifying purposes within the created order.

Edwards, of course, had both theological and philosophical reasons to support his position. Theologically, natural-men are the subject of redemption – God's redeeming work was accomplished for and is applied to depraved human beings. Of course, natural-men are redeemed *from* something, namely, inherent corruption, slavery to sin, bondage to the devil, and the wrathful judgment of God. In short, the plight man brought upon himself as the consequence of the fall from grace. (Again, not a very flattering picture of human beings.) But still, natural-men play a very active and important role in the drama of redemption history. They are the recipients of both common and redeeming graces, both natural and special revelation. But then again, if any grace avails unto salvation we are no longer speaking about natural-men but the elect of Edwards' Calvinistic particularism.

Theologically nothing positive is really being said about reprobates or natural-men *per se*, only about what God does *to* them in order to extract glory for Himself (e.g. redeem them, judge and destroy them, etc.), or has done among them (e.g. the Incarnation). The deist charge echoes again, 'What about the five-sixths of the "heathenish world" who not so much have even heard the gospel, let alone "gospel sinners", who have heard and yet continue in a "natural" or reprobate condition? What intrinsic value do they have, and what is their active role in glorifying God in the world?'

Hence my contention that if we hope to find positive significance and worth for the natural-man and reprobate in Edwards' theocentric thought, then we cannot merely look to his theology. Looking only at his Reformed theology will yield only Calvinistic particularism, at least in this respect. Likewise, trying to understand his larger theocentric worldview in the light of the particulars of his Reformed theology is only to work in the opposite fashion to which Edwards himself thought. The 'new spiritual sense' is an aesthetic vision not of the doctrine of double predestination, but of God's beautiful being. In light of *that* beauty we theoretically begin to appreciate and understand the beauties of God's special revelation, the Bible, through which He conveys the 'reasonable' manner of His interaction with human beings and orchestration of history. All of which is to say, we must step back from a close examination of Edwards' Reformed theology and consider his assessment of natural-men/reprobates from the perspective of his philosophical-theology in order to understand in what capacity they serve God and how they possess inherent value in time and space.

In effect, this is what some contemporary scholars (specifically, Anri Morimoto and Gerald R. McDermott) have done based upon the pioneering work of Prof. Sang Hyun Lee on the subject of Edwards and dispositions. In *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards: The Idea of Habit and Edwards' Dynamic Vision of Reality*, Lee claims that 'There is in Edwards' thought a shift of categories in terms of which the very nature of things is



explicated. Edwards departed from the traditional Western Metaphysics of substance and form and replaced it with a strikingly modern conception of reality as a dynamic network of dispositional forces and habits.<sup>29</sup> Included in this reinterpretation of reality is the ontology of human beings. In ‘The Mind’ notebook, Edwards once wrote: ‘It is laws that constitute all permanent being in created things, both corporeal and spiritual.’ A short while later he added the thought that ‘laws’ are ‘stated methods fixed by God,’ on which ‘the very being of created things depend.’<sup>30</sup> These laws operate with a kind of conditionality, according to Lee’s understanding of ‘M’ 241, in which Edwards states, ‘all habits [are] a law that God has fixed, that such actions upon such occasions should be exerted.’ Habits and dispositions are therefore understood as the laws according to which God causes actions and events. For Lee, Morimoto, and McDermott, these principles also constitute the axioms of Edwards’ dispositional ontology. Concomitant with these principles are two contrasting claims that are, in the words of Morimoto, ‘integrated in a dynamic unity: the world’s radical and total dependence upon God, and its relative permanence and integrity.’<sup>31</sup>

Concerning the first claim, Lee argues that all things depend entirely on the intervention of God’s causal power. As Morimoto puts it, ‘If being is essentially laws and habits ... then all created entities tend inherently and unceasingly toward actual existence through the immediate exercise of divine power in them.’ Morimoto continues by citing Lee, who writes: ‘Reality is not something that is achieved once and for all but something that is achieved again and again.’<sup>32</sup> This interpretation is then set forth to explain Edwards’ doctrine of continuous-creation.<sup>33</sup>

The second claim argues that laws and habits possess their own mode of reality apart from actual exercise. Thus, Edwards’ aetiology only *appears* occasionalistic and creationistic:

... in Edwards [dispositions] are not just an indication of likelihood that similar events happen in similar circumstances; they are active and prescriptive laws that determine events and actions in specific detail. As conditional laws, habits and dispositions certainly become active when the specified occasions arise. Habits are an ‘active tendency,’ that is, always tending to actual existence. Once conditions are met, the exertion of habits is necessary and automatic....<sup>34</sup>

An unexercised disposition’s abiding and permanent reality, therefore, lies in its ‘real possibility’ or ‘virtuality’, though it becomes fully actual when in actual exercise.

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<sup>29</sup> Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 4, 77. Lee is the K.C. Han Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary and a member of the Editorial Committee for the Yale edition of JE’s *Works*. He has also written the ‘EI’ to the forthcoming *Works, Volume 20, Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, along with several important articles on JE’s dispositional conception of reality (see the ‘Bibliography’ affixed below).

<sup>30</sup> ‘Subjects to be Handled in the Treatise on the Mind’ Nos. 36 and 50, *Works* 6, 391, 392.

<sup>31</sup> *Catholic Vision*, 55.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*; Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 50.

<sup>33</sup> Also referred to as the doctrine of divine preservation or the conservation of matter.

<sup>34</sup> Morimoto, *Catholic Vision*, 55; cf. Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 40, 44.



How these philosophical meditations figure into a reassessment of the value of the natural-man comes out in Morimoto and McDermott's analogous interpretations of Edwards' soteriology. Where McClymond and Holmes encounter an impasse in Edwards' particularist system concerning the place of reprobates, and to a lesser degree, natural-men, Morimoto and McDermott find little difficulty. That is, because of Edwards' dispositional ontology, Morimoto and McDermott do not see him supporting a restrictivist position inclusive of a doctrine of reprobation. Quite the contrary: in his *private* notebooks Edwards really was an inclusivist, if not a crypto-universalist. His public theology simply does not reflect the direction his theology had taken in the confidentiality of his Northampton study. In private, Morimoto and McDermott would argue, Edwards experimented with his dispositional ontology and the universal implications of Christ's redemptive work.

According to Morimoto, initial salvation occurred at the cross: this work of Christ is universal in scope and application – all reap the saving benefit of an infused gracious disposition. The bare (unexercised) possession of it constitutes regeneration and, therefore, salvation. For Morimoto, Edwards' soteriology is primarily about ontological transformation, i.e. regeneration; justification is linked with conversion – an altogether secondary issue.

So, in addition to this kind of universalism, Edwards allegedly evinces a more prominent inclusivistic position, particularly when he publicly presses for a justified community. In Morimoto's reading, Edwards' evangelistic preaching was not about salvation from imminent damnation, but intended to 'trigger' the gracious disposition to an exercise of faith, thereby 'converting' the individual and allowing them the benefit of *affectionally* enjoying Christ's saving work. Since all are, for all intents and purposes, accounted believers because of the faith *virtually* contained within the disposition (hence, its lawlike *tendency*), only those who exercise it attain this second salvation.<sup>35</sup> The disposition, Morimoto maintains, is not unlike Edwardsean dispositions in causality: in a prescribed connection, a lawlike disposition yields its manifestation. In this case, it yields faith in connection with certain Christian 'means'.

McDermott advances Morimoto's revision as he considers Edwards' extensive interest in non-Christian religions. Taking his lead from Morimoto, McDermott argues that, in light of Edwards' dispositional philosophy, the combination of the powers of reasoning in the 'heathen' and the plethora of natural revelation available to them allows for the possibility of those unreached by the gospel—the 'five-sixths of the world'—to worship and even be 'justified', i.e. converted, by the Christian God of special revelation, *without* having to trust in Jesus Christ for salvation.<sup>36</sup> Just as the disposition yields justifying faith in connection with Christian 'means and ordinances' in Morimoto's *Catholic Vision of Salvation*, so too, according to McDermott, God has provided the 'heathen' with non-Christian 'means and

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., cc. 3, 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Confronts the Gods*, 3, 12-13.



ordinances' to educe an exercise of faith for their justification. Edwards is not an inclusivist, but a hyper-inclusivist – all human beings have value and being because all share in Christ's human-ontology-transforming-salvation.

While Lee's analysis of Edwards' philosophy of dispositions is a significant and, in many ways, *bona fide* contribution toward understanding—in a more systematic way—the micro and macro levels of Edwards' philosophical-theology, yet Morimoto and McDermott have cast their lines too far from their subject's expressed thought. As a result, their work fails to represent accurately the thought of Jonathan Edwards for three main reasons:

1. Their unqualified acceptance of Lee's explanation of Edwardsean dispositions. Lee's work cannot be accepted in its entirety. There are, in fact, a number of contestable positions fundamental to Lee's overall project, not the least of which are his accounts of Edwards' causality and so-called 'complete departure' from the Aristotelian-Scholastic ontology of 'substance'.
2. Their refusal to read Edwards according to his admittedly confessional theological position. Edwards is much more of a traditionally consistent Calvinist than either of the authors allow.
3. Perhaps most importantly, they fail to work with deference to the grand scale and organic nature of Edwards' theocentric and telic-oriented system.

At the fore of Edwards' thought—whether exegetical, theological, or philosophical—is a principle of theocentricity.<sup>37</sup> In nearly everything he wrote or preached, from the time of his conversion to the last great work he proposed, God is at center. At first, both his Reformed tradition, which stressed that the universe did not run 'by chance' but 'by God the sovereign disposer of all [things]',<sup>38</sup> and his theological or perhaps pietistic desire to remove the Enlightenment wedge of rationalism from its lodgings between a mechanistic universe and Christian supernaturalism, contributed significantly to his pre-conversion theocentric impulses. He understood that to be a Calvinist was to be a theocentrist: it was just a matter of degrees as to how theocentric one really was. Early on, Edwards seems only to have parroted this trait characteristic of his theological tradition. He was more focused on Enlightenment thought than the promotion of God-at-the-center-of-everything.<sup>39</sup>

However, following the events of spring 1721, the time when Edwards testifies that he began to 'see' God's being, telic purposes, and cosmic design in 'everything,' his conditioned God-centered impulses became to him a permanent, pervasive, and axiomatic mental

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<sup>37</sup> McClymond states that it is the 'principle of theocentricity ... where God is the measure of all things,' which gives coherence to the various fundamental and distinctive motifs operating in JE's complex thought, as well as his diverse and voluminous writings (*Encounters*, 28). The claim that theocentrism is the principal organizing concept in JE's thought is not an overly reductionistic statement. For JE, theocentrism is not a monodimensional doctrine; it is a genus with many species, which, having enveloped any number of disciplines, terminate in some God-centered idea. Scholars are beginning to form a consensus to this end, see for instance, Colwell, 'Jonathan Edwards', 175; Holmes, *God of Grace*, 22-23, 244-45; McClymond, 'God the Measure', 43-59; Elwood, *PTJE*, 10-12; Schafer, 'Jonathan Edwards', 381-82; Holbrook, *Ethics of JE*, 2-7.

<sup>38</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III.2.1. Cf. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, V, 'Of Providence'.

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter I §1.b.



principle.<sup>40</sup> No longer did he have to reason through the apparatus of logic to ascertain the connection between, say, a flower and God's purpose and presence with relation to that flower. Now he intuitively 'sensed' the spiritual reality through which the flower possessed meaning and existence. That reality, he said, is the Divine Being: 'God and real existence are the same.'<sup>41</sup> And 'existence' itself is fulfilling a purpose and moving toward an 'ultimate end'. Thus, Edwards pushed the theocentric trait characteristic of Calvinistic thought to its limit by making a *theocentrism of ends* the foremost regulative principle of his philosophical-theology.<sup>42</sup>

Subsequently, he no longer troubled himself with the need to reconcile his youthful doubts and disenchantment with the doctrine of God's self-glorifying, sovereign disposal of the created order. Indeed, it was no longer a question for him, but an assured worldview.<sup>43</sup> Now the question was, 'How does one express the concept of the immanence of God and His telic purposes of self-glorification in time and space?' That is, 'How does one reasonably explain the "vision" of God transcendent/God immanent with relation to the created order?' His *philosophical* answer is presented in the idea of *divine comprehensiveness*.<sup>44</sup> For Edwards, the idea of God's comprehensiveness, the notion that God's very existence encompasses created reality itself, metaphysically explains both why and how God and His glory and purposes are 'seen' in everything. This idea not only corresponded with his post-conversion theocentric and aesthetic vision, but, according to Edwards, it was Scriptural, Trinitarian in nature, and made sense of passages like, Acts 17:28, 'In Him we live and move and have our being.'<sup>45</sup> He also believed it was rational: it provided an accommodating explanation of

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<sup>40</sup> See *PN, Works16*, 790-804.

<sup>41</sup> 'The Mind' 15, *Works6*, 345.

<sup>42</sup> See Chapter II §1.b. and following.

<sup>43</sup> JE came to define divine sovereignty as God's 'ability and authority to do whatever pleases him; whereby "he doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and amongst the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand... {Dan.4:35}." The following things belong to the *sovereignty* of God; viz. (1) supreme, universal, and infinite *power* ... (2) That he has supreme *authority*; absolute and most perfect right to do what he wills ... (3) That his *will* is supreme, underived, and independent ... (4) That his *wisdom*, which determines his will, is supreme, perfect, underived, self-sufficient, and independent' (*Works1*, 378-80).

<sup>44</sup> This idea receives further attention in Chapters I and II. JE's strictly *theological* answer to this question is found in his Trinitarian account of creation (v.s. pp.13-14; and v.i. Chapters II and IV). Though it should be mentioned here that by 'comprehensiveness' I mean the sense in which God's being includes, overlaps, and exists through the created order. George Rupp and Sang Hyun Lee both use the term 'coextensive' and therewith indicate that God's being actually extends *in* the created order. As we shall see, there is a sense in which JE indicates that God extends Himself in the created order. But to use the terms 'coextensive' or 'coextend' creates a series of philosophical difficulties by giving God dimensional boundaries in time and space. In my use of 'comprehensiveness,' I seek to maintain JE's differentiation between the being of God and the created order as such, as well as uphold the ontological priority he gives to God. Furthermore, unlike 'coextend', 'comprehensive' is a term and idea used by JE in this connection. Rupp, 'The "Idealism" of Jonathan Edwards', 214; Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 170f.

<sup>45</sup> 'Practical Atheism' (1730), *Works17*, 51. Cf. Ps. 139:7-10 (1727).



providence, general revelation and the theology of nature, as well as a reasonable answer to why God created the world.

Additionally, it is within the context of his contemplative thoughts about God and God's relation to reality that, whatever dispositional concepts Edwards may have been introduced to during his time at Yale College, then come to the fore.<sup>46</sup>

Tracing the logic of God's comprehensiveness backwards Edwards quickly came to the conclusion that there must be a perfecting 'disposition' within God to supply the impulse by which He communicates the idea of His perfections 'externally'. Such a disposition could not be any thing or power apart from God, and so he reasoned that God's essence must consist of a disposition or a set of dispositions saying, 'the diffusive disposition that excited God to give creatures existence was rather a communicative disposition in general, or a disposition in the fullness of the divinity to flow out and diffuse itself.'<sup>47</sup> Though not original to Edwards, he was now to conceive of God as a communicative, self-enlarging being, whose essence communicates its entire *ad intra* 'fullness' *ad extra*.<sup>48</sup> The ideas of comprehensiveness and disposition, then, are crucial concepts for Edwards' post-conversion conception of God and His relation to temporal reality. These concepts are treated in Chapters I and II.

Despite his emergent dispositional philosophy, Edwards did not completely depart from the Aristotelian-Scholastic ontology of 'substance' as Sang Lee argues.<sup>49</sup> Lee stands correct in certain respects, particularly with regard to matter, but not so of God's essential being. Lee over-extends his application of Edwards' employment of ontological dispositions to make God's irreducible essence a disposition. To be sure, Edwards' use of dispositions in ontology did begin with a consideration of what *in* God brought about His creative activities—a certain dynamic disposition. Moreover, Lee is correct to say (with Wallace E. Anderson) that Edwards' dispositional concepts facilitated his reconception of the ontological structure of the Trinity, and that both these notions had radical implications upon how the created order was conceived by him. But neither God nor man is to be thought of *only* in terms of disposition: Edwards retained 'substance' concepts and terminology for both.

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<sup>46</sup> Many of my insights concerning 'disposition' have arisen from either my conversations with Professor Lee or my reading of his interpretive work on JE. However, my work on 'divine comprehension', the essence of God and man (in terms of substance), and the conclusions I draw from them, significantly differ from Lee's interpretations.

<sup>47</sup> *Work8*, 434-35. Although expressed here in the mature reflection of *EofC* (c.1754, posthumously published 1765), JE had been articulating this idea since 1723, if not before. See 'M'87, 92, and 107[b].

<sup>48</sup> E.g. The Cambridge Platonist John Smith spoke about the idea of God's communicating Himself *ad extra* in the creation. Smith also held that the creation was the externalizing of that which was prior *within* the Deity. Furthermore, God was moved to create, according to Smith, out of His 'fullness'. See Smith, 'A Discourse Concerning the Existence and Nature of God' in *Select Discourses*. See also Wilson H. Kinnach's confirmation and brief analysis of the remarkable conceptual and rhetorical correlations between Smith and JE in 'General Introduction', *Works10*, 6-9.

<sup>49</sup> Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 4, 77.



Edwards does express, however, that God's comprehension of reality is the dispositional result of the divine 'fullness' or essence.<sup>50</sup> He also reasons that since God's relation to the created order is founded upon dispositional principles, then the created order must be conceived in like terms of dispositional forces and laws. For Edwards, this meant a re-evaluation of the entire created order—including the ontological status and epistemic perspective of natural-men and reprobates—in light of God's all-comprehensive reality and ontological structure.<sup>51</sup> For us, the idea of God's comprehension of reality, along with the ontological arrangement of God's trinitarian self, facilitates new possibilities for understanding in Edwards' thought the existence and function of *all* intelligent perceiving beings, but with the following criteria: (1) that we allow Edwards to guide us concerning his intellectual positions as he connects them or they manifest their connection with certain events in his life (e.g. his conversion experience); (2) we do not presume against the evidence, and even Edwards' oft repeated profession of confessional adherence, that he held contradictory public and private theologies; and (3) we keep in focus the controlling principle of telic-theocentrism and narrative of God's self-glorification through bilateral redemptive activities (i.e. in terms of electing a church and effecting salvation for them, and justly damning and punishing the reprobate portion of humankind) characteristic of his philosophical-theology.

By approaching Edwards' treatment of the existence and function of human beings from the perspective of his dispositional philosophical-theology in lieu of the aforementioned criteria, we may ascertain the positive significance and inherent value he intends, indeed, requires for natural-men and reprobates *as* natural-men and reprobates. Every human being possesses inherent value and functional significance in his theocentric metaphysics in at least two ways: First, Edwards ascribes inherent, ineradicable value to the being of natural-man (and therefore the reprobate) by conceiving of natural-man's ontological structure in such a way that it, in and of itself, is an instance of beauty, imaging forth the beauty of God. It is to be remembered that Edwards was not obsessed by the wrath of God but by His beauty – a beauty that constitutes the matrix of existence, created and uncreated, unfallen or fallen. The very being of the natural-man/reprobate, inasmuch as it is to be found within that matrix, itself is an instance of divine beauty. For Edwards, an intelligent perceiving being's (*IPB*)<sup>52</sup> mental existence is the most complete form of the *imago Dei* in time and space (save for the Incarnation and the noetic restoration of the regenerate), and therefore the only substantial

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<sup>50</sup> *EofC*, Works8, 433; 'M'553, Works18, 97.

<sup>51</sup> Lee undertakes an extensive examination of human knowledge and ontology in *Philosophical Theology* but, in large part, independent of an immediate consideration of God's being. That is, Lee does not pursue his study with God's 'comprehensiveness' or JE's panentheism in mind: indeed, if he acknowledges either of these notions in the same manner that I do.

<sup>52</sup> I will use *IPM* (intelligent perceiving minds) to designate a category of consciousnesses that, along with human beings, includes angelic beings.



‘mental’ image of God outside the Trinity. Because Edwards primarily associates a human being’s divine image with its ontological structure, I have not included it as a positive element of his theology, though there undoubtedly is substantial overlap.<sup>53</sup> The particular question of how the bare existence of the reprobate is directly related to creation as *ekstasis* will be discussed in due course.

Secondly, we find that in Edwards’ philosophical idealism (which in large measure developed alongside his philosophy of dispositions) the natural-man/reprobate has a positive function in God’s program of self-glorification in time and space. Edwards’ idealism is based upon the axiom, ‘all [created] existence is perception,’ that is, the perception of ideas.<sup>54</sup> These ‘ideas’ are God’s communicated ‘ideas of existence’. According to Edwards, the perceiving of such ideas requires an intelligent perceiving ‘something’ to receive (perceive) them. That something is ‘intelligent perceiving being’ (*IPB*) or human being. In order for the total idea of God’s fullness to be ‘*ad extra*’, there must be an intelligent perceiving consciousness *ad extra* to God in order to perceive the ideas associated with His fullness. Human beings, even fallen natural-men and reprobates, are the world’s consciousness and therefore have value to God in that regard.

This of course ties into the theocentric/telic reason of *why* God created, namely, to perfect the divine disposition to ‘externalize’ His prior beauty and actuality (‘fullness’)—a process Edwards identifies as God’s self-communication for glorification. First, however, the process is internal to God and thoroughly Trinitarian: God the Father’s ‘fullness’ is His perfections, which only and summarily consist in the Son and the Spirit.<sup>55</sup> The Son is the Father’s perfect image and knowledge of Himself, the Spirit His love and delight of Himself. Thus, God’s essence consists of one innertrinitarian idea of Himself perfectly known and loved. The image and affections (love) associated with the Father’s essential idea are, as Edwards would say, ‘perfect’ and therefore ‘substantial’, or in other words, ontological.<sup>56</sup> Then the process turns external: God, Edwards explains, also delights to have His innertrinitarian perfections glorified by ‘existing *ad extra*’.<sup>57</sup> But for God’s perfections to exist ‘*ad extra*’ according to their nature, they must be perceived in a manner that corresponds to those perfections. Minds created in His image are capable of intellectually and affectionally perceiving the idea of God’s knowledge and love. Once that idea is emanated (communicated) and perceived in a fashion corresponding to His perfections (knowledge and love of Himself), those perfections are replicated and God is correspondingly glorified: hence Edwards’

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<sup>53</sup> E.g. according to JE’s reading of the Bible, natural-man possesses eradicable value because he is created in ‘the image of God,’ which, though marred by the fall, remains as that ‘which belongs to the nature of man’ (*Works3*, 381). As shown in Chapters III and IV, by the ‘nature of man’ JE means the ontological mental structure and essential dispositions of man.

<sup>54</sup> *Works6*, 384.

<sup>55</sup> See Holmes, *God of Grace*, 69.

<sup>56</sup> Per ‘An Essay on the Trinity’ in *Treatise*, 99-104, 107-11.

<sup>57</sup> *EofC*, *Works 8*, 531.



conclusion that the telic function of created existences is to ‘remanate’ the ‘effulgent’ glory of God.<sup>58</sup> In Edwards’ idealism *IPBs* not so much authenticate as facilitate God’s program of self-enlargement. Which is to say, Edwards’ idealism requires God to have intelligent minds *perceive* the divine communication of Himself ‘*ad extra*’ in order for it to be ‘real’ or concretely present to them and valuable to God.<sup>59</sup> Without perceiving minds (or ‘consciousnesses’, as Edwards calls them) to perceive God’s ideas, God cannot manifest Himself *ad extra*. The reason for this is obvious to Edwards – such communications and glorifying ‘had as good not be as be’ without perceivers. Therefore, if the creation is to exist and God is going to communicate the idea of Himself in/ through it, then the world ‘must be conscious of its own being’. That is, the world must be conscious of its own reality and God’s presence within the world for it ‘to be of any value’.<sup>60</sup>

For Edwards, an *IPB*’s ontological status is derivative of God’s reality.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, I propose that Edwards indicates that the ontological status of sentient beings determines the content of their epistemological perspectives (whether it is spiritual or not) and, consequently, what they ‘sensibly’ know and perceive about reality (whether it corresponds with God’s truth/reality or not). Thus, the calculated ‘degree’ of ‘value’ that Edwards attributes to the existence of an *IPB*, as well as their knowledge and states of consciousness, is determined by an ontological factor – nearness to God in terms of likeness, or theologically, union with Christ. Which is to say, Edwards’ philosophy for evaluating both the quality and purpose of existence of an *IPB*, inclusive of the reprobate, is based upon an ontological system of relations, not proximity. So far from embracing a representative Neoplatonic conception of the universe,<sup>62</sup> Edwards proposes an ontological conception of reality that makes use of philosophical idealism, modern dispositional concepts (which represent created existences as relational and progressive), and Scholastic notions of substance (where dispositions have or are designated a *locus*). And it is within this proposal that even the natural-man and reprobate contribute to the matrix of divine beauty by virtue of their relationally determined ontological value and the kind of knowledge they perceive and ‘remanate’.

Therefore, if we are to represent accurately Edwards’ philosophical-theology concerning the functional existence of the natural-man/reprobate, then it must be in light of God’s comprehension of reality. Simply stated, God will be my centerpiece for developing the

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<sup>58</sup> For an analysis of JE’s dynamic conception of the glory of God, which employs the logic of disposition, see Jang, ‘The Logic of Glorification’.

<sup>59</sup> See Chapters II and III below.

<sup>60</sup> ‘M’ 1, *Works* 13, 197; ‘The Mind’ 67, *Works* 6, 384.

<sup>61</sup> Rupp, ‘The “Idealism” of Jonathan Edwards’, 214. Indeed, as we shall see in Chapter II, the ontological status of any finite existence is determined by its nearness to God in terms of likeness of being.

<sup>62</sup> Such as those derived from Plotinus’ innovations developed in his essays the *Enneads*. By denying this aspect of Neoplatonism, I do intend to convey the notion that JE was not Platonic or Neoplatonic in other respects. As we shall see throughout our discussion, he certain was!



discussion of Edwards' philosophy of the being and function of the reprobate, on account of the fact that God invades every aspect of his thought concerning existence and knowledge.

The sudden prominence of Edwards' 'theocentrism of ends' in his writings from 1723 onwards also compels me to grant that a metaphysical reconception of reality was not at the fore of his intellectual agenda from the start; rather, it was, as he himself explains, more the product of his post-conversion perspective. His first metaphysical speculations, which probably coincided with his senior collegiate year and graduate studies at Yale (1719-1722), were relatively unimaginative, as he attempted to harmonize favorable points in Locke, Newton, More, Shaftesbury, and others, with his theological heritage. Again, it would appear that his post-conversion perspectives changed this. For immediately after that time he began to show his originality as a thinker through his independently creative theology and, coinciding with its development, the modernity of his thought through his dispositional and relational ideas.<sup>63</sup> But what his emergent idealism and dispositional concepts revolved around, indeed, facilitated, and were subservient to, was a radically theocentric perspective of reality.

Thus when Edwards embarked upon an idealistic reconception of reality, using dispositional concepts to explain its relevance to a Newtonian world, or when he contemplated the existence and ontological structure of human beings, such thoughts were intended to be consistent with his continuing idea of God. His idea of divine dispositions, for example, is the result of his (doctrinally informed) post-conversion perception of God. What is more, we can be sure that his theological (Biblical) presuppositions, such as God's immutability, eternality, and aseity, color, mold and shape his metaphysical speculations. These uncompromisable doctrines of Reformed Scholasticism, indeed, even of Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin, establish a continuous identification between Edwards' philosophical-theology and his theological heritage, while on the other hand they also particularly distinguish his dispositional concepts about God and reality from later process thought.

Yet it is also *because* Edwards frequently mirrored a medieval depiction of an immutable God, and openly asserted his dependence upon the Bible, as well as rigorously defended fundamental doctrines of Calvinism, that many scholars have neglected his philosophical innovations and simply cast him as an extraordinary *Puritan* thinker, or in the language of his day, as a 'philosophizing divine'. In other words, on account of his pervasive theocentricity, in which he clearly aligned himself with his theological tradition and pressed a theocentric worldview to an extreme, some interpreters of Edwards cannot see him other than as a hybrid

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<sup>63</sup> Schafer points out that Sereno Dwight's assignment of 'Of Being' in its entirety to JE's early college years has encouraged many scholars to produce work showing JE's dependence on Locke and Berkeley for these conclusions. 'But,' Schafer explains, 'it seems clear that Edwards evolved his so-called "idealism" without the benefit of Locke's [or Berkeley's] ideas, against the background of his own previous conclusions about matter and more directly his own single-minded contemplations of God and his works' ('EI', *Works* 13, 46-47). Schafer's position has now become the consensus among scholars.



Reformed Scholastic and fringe Enlightenment philosopher.<sup>64</sup> Certainly his view on God and the Bible are undeniable and pervasive aspects of his thought.<sup>65</sup> To be sure, Edwards' emphasis and reliance upon special revelation colors almost every aspect of his thought – from his most speculative theological excursions to the most foundational of his philosophical precepts.<sup>66</sup> So much so, that George Gordon once complained, 'It is not edifying to see Edwards, in the full movement of speculation, suddenly pause, begin a new section of his essay, and lug into his argument proof texts from every corner of the Bible to cover the incompleteness of his rational procedure.'<sup>67</sup> For this same reason, Peter Gay denounced Edwards as confined to a biblical 'cage' and concluded that he was not a true Enlightenment thinker.<sup>68</sup> But neither Edwards' theocentrism nor his Biblicism strictly marginalized his philosophical thought. Rather than denying him a standing among Enlightenment thinkers on account of his God-centeredness, it was his 'theocentrism of ends' that gave rise to his conception of reality as composed of telic-oriented dispositions – a conception which establishes him as a modern 'theocentric metaphysician'.<sup>69</sup> To be sure, his conception of reality demonstrates a philosophical content that is, in many respects, identifiably modern and not purely medieval, though his connection with the Scholastic tradition—both Medieval and Reformed—is undeniable and pervasive.<sup>70</sup>

As one of the features of this dissertation, I shall attempt to evidence the claim that Edwards, on the whole, exemplifies a synthesis between the *via antiqua* and *via moderna*, moving from being to will and back again as the primal metaphors for understanding God, shifting from metaphysics to metahistory and back again as a means of understanding God's relation to the created world, and shifting from the ontological to the logical and back again as a methodology for doing theology. In short, this study shall regard the idea that Edwards, as a somewhat independent and imaginative spirit, was a formal system builder of a philosophical-theology that exhibited an organic nature beyond the 'closed' system of sixteenth-century Puritans and Reformed Scholastics.

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<sup>64</sup> For example, Robert C. Whittemore depicts JE as far more medieval than modern in *The Transformation of New England Theology*. Leon Chai portrays JE as an aspiring, yet failing Enlightenment thinker in *Limits of Enlightenment*. While John H. Gerstner presents JE as the quintessential Reformed Scholastic theologian and 'classical' apologist in *Rational Biblical*, 1:1-139.

<sup>65</sup> John E. Smith writes: 'Edwards accepted totally the tradition established by the Reformers with respect to the absolute primacy and authority of the Bible, and he could approach the biblical writings with that conviction of their inerrancy and literal truth' ('Jonathan Edwards as Philosophical Theologian', 306). Cf. Stein, 'The Spirit and the Word' in *American Experience*, 118-30.

<sup>66</sup> For examples of his imaginative theological work see, Ps. 8:4-5 (1744/45), 'M'591, *Works*18, 124-25, and *Typological Writings*, *Works*11. For a distinctly Bible-based philosophical precept, see entry No. 44 'Things to be Considered an[d] Written Fully About', *Works*6, 238.

<sup>67</sup> Cited in Foster, *A Genetic History of New England Theology*, 51.

<sup>68</sup> Gay, *A Loss of Mastery*, 97. Cf. Opie, *Edwards and the Enlightenment*, 101-05. I am indebted to John H. Gerstner's *Rational Biblical*, 1:102-03, for these references and citations.

<sup>69</sup> Fiering considers JE's theocentric metaphysics comparable to Malebranche and Leibniz ('The Rationalist Foundations of Jonathan Edwards' in *American Experience*, 77; *Moral Thought*, passim).

<sup>70</sup> This holds true even with respect to dispositional concepts vis-à-vis Aquinas.



Explicating the basic content of Edwards' dispositional concepts around God not only corresponds with his patent theocentrism, but also proves a suitable method for explaining their relation to matter, causality, and, of course, created intelligence. What amounts to a principle of telic-theocentricity is a regulating precept for all matters theological, historical, philosophical, and ethical. For Edwards, every created thing relates to God in some programmatic way, and through God every thing gains meaning, purpose, and even existence. Edwards' theocentrism is, then, the cohesive hermeneutical principle by which he reads, interprets, and understands reality.

His thoughts on natural-men and reprobates are therefore no exception to his theocentric parameters for speculation. He confidently set forth a meta-narrative for all existences, to which all existences are subject. That meta-narrative is God's program of self-glorification through self-communication/replication. Edwards insists God's being is 'expansive' and the Divine Being created the world that He may replicate His *ad intra* perfections '*ad extra*'. That replication, he explains, obtains through the ontological and epistemological dimensions of human beings – even fallen ones, and even those predestined for damnation.

What the reader should then expect within the work that follows is a piece of scholarly exposition, clarification, and commentary almost entirely internal to the presuppositions, views, and logic of Jonathan Edwards: a thesis showing that Edwards' thinking is consciously of a grand scale and systematic, driven by the single vision of God and His self-glorification. I principally intend to throw new light on how he philosophically understood the relationship of not just the natural-man, but specifically the reprobate, to God's grand scheme of self-glorification through self-replication and redemption. My assertion that his philosophical-theology not only accommodates an affirmative and contributive (functional) view of man, but also requires such a view, builds on the premise that his theocentric 'vision' solidified his idea of God's comprehensiveness, and that this idea significantly contributed to his employment of dispositional concepts. In turn I argue that a consistently thorough application of dispositional concepts meant for Edwards the reconsideration of the cosmic design and telic purposes of *IPBs*, who, in light of his doctrine of divine 'comprehension', are constructive ontological and epistemological participants in the matrix of divine beauty.

Throughout the following pages we shall find that, although Edwards in no way retreats from his theological tradition's assertion of total depravity, original sin, reprobation, and literal hell torments, yet he philosophically proposes that the ontological structure and epistemic content of unregenerate human beings positively contribute to the spatiotemporal beautification of God<sup>71</sup> and, theologically, the progress of redemption history. However, just

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<sup>71</sup> 'M'204, *Works*13, 339 (v.s. p.12, introductory quote). When JE speaks of God communicating 'with spirits according to their *nature* and *capacity*' he must be understood to be operating within the boundaries of his idealism and dispositional philosophy, where 'nature' corresponds with his



as the concept of disposition accounts for the ontological and epistemological contribution of *IPBs*, so too it provides Edwards with a metaphysical rationale for the sinful nature of the unregenerate, as well as how and why God can be glorified in the temporal retributions and eternal destruction of the reprobate. Thus, Edwards' philosophy of dispositions provides both a comprehensive and internally coherent foundation for his positive philosophical and negative theological representations of the natural-man and, especially, the reprobate.

My thesis therefore affirms Edwards' underlying principles for reprobation. Contrary to the assertions of certain revisionist commentators, the idea of reprobation for Edwards is neither the theological residuum of his early particularist convictions (supposedly abandoned for more inclusivist opinions), nor an incompatible element in his philosophical-theology. Rather, it is an integral part of his theocentric worldview, laden with metaphysical reasoning, and not at all inconsistent with his doctrines of God, creation, and salvation.<sup>72</sup>

As the chapters progress, the ideas represented in them will reflect an eighteenth-century character who was strongly Calvinistic in his theology, a determinist in his aetiology, consciously teleological in his worldview, unapologetic about his 'Biblical' anthropology and soteriological particularism, but also creative and serious about his evangelistic engagement with unregenerates.

By and large, the reader should not expect five particulate, unrelated chapters, but a single discussion progressing in an attempt to exemplify Edwards' 'theocentrism of ends' in which dispositions function as the regulative mechanism within his metaphysics of finality – even with respect to reprobates. Moreover, the reader should not expect a critique from other than Edwards' own perspective, except for my interaction with modern-day scholars and my own personal reflections found in the 'Conclusion'.

Edwards has several distinct approaches to conveying aspects of God's self-enlarging disposition and its implications for his theological anthropology: an apologetical approach, an exegetical or theological approach, and a philosophical approach. In some places more than others, and for didactic or polemical purposes, he at times emphasizes one of these approaches above the others to achieve a particular effect. However, no one approach is to be understood as unconnected and particulate, but for the most part form a highly integrated, interdependent method. In his writings he is not in one place a theologian, in another a Puritan

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ontological intentions and 'capacity' with his epistemological intentions. Hence this 'Miscellanies' entry, like so many others, is not simply about the epistemological issue of revelation, but inasmuch as the communication of any idea—especially a divine idea—is both intellectually and inclinationally perceived, it is internally related to the perceiver, and therefore has ontological significance. That is, the ability to perceive divine ideas, JE says, is only consequent upon an ontological relation (union) to the source of spiritual ideas, viz. God.

<sup>72</sup> Fiering, writing with a view to JE's moral theology, affirms: 'In addition to [Edwards'] major books on free will and original sin, his various writings on hell complete the story of man's reprobation, making the entire presentation exceedingly thorough' (*Moral Thought*, 205).



minister, and in another a philosopher. He rarely if ever approaches any subject monodimensionally. Rather, he is a New England Puritan-philosophical theologian. Paul Ramsey rightly warns that to abstract Edwards' 'philosophy from its theological context tends to obscure Jonathan Edwards' extraordinary confidence that the truths of faith and of reason are *one*.'<sup>73</sup> Thus, apart from certain papers (which were not theologically void, but frequently possess some religious content for the purpose of expounding or complementing a theocentric principle) he produced no purely philosophical works.<sup>74</sup>

In light of the intertwined nature of his philosophy and theology I have chosen to incorporate the use of Edwards' sermon corpus (in addition to his notebooks and treatises) as a means of exploring and evincing the being and function of the natural-man and reprobate in God's self-glorifying scheme. Not only did his treatises teem with philosophical reflections, all of which were intended to clarify and define his theological positions, but his sermons did as well.

Therefore we may expect the content of the following chapters to be philosophical, but necessarily theological. Yet, inasmuch as Jonathan Edwards is a historical figure working within identifiable theological, intellectual, and social settings, certain portions of this work may well be deemed historiographical, though it is not within the proposed purview of this study to trace the historical circumstances or intellectual influences that may or may not have caused Edwards to think the way he did on each and every occasion. This is not to say those studies are not helpful, they certainly are, and have substantially informed my work here.<sup>75</sup> But unlike McDermott's book, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, which is a context and source study of how Edwards *apologetically* responded to the radical Enlightenment's challenge to Reformed orthodoxy, I focus on the cosmological and teleological implications of Edwards' modern dispositional philosophy as it applies to unregenerate human beings.

The question of exactly how 'modern' he was itself remains to be definitively answered and would be the subject of another study.<sup>76</sup> Accordingly, my efforts here will not feign to be conclusive concerning the placing of Edwards' modernity. Which is to say, locating his

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<sup>73</sup> Ramsey, 'EI', *Works*8, 6 n. 5.

<sup>74</sup> The relevance of his philosophical contemplations also found their way into doctrinal matters via applications or 'corollaries' affixed to the end of his more philosophical entries.

<sup>75</sup> For interesting and valuable studies tracing the JE's intellectual inheritance and development see, Morris, *The Young Jonathan Edwards*; Fiering, *Moral Thought*; Warch, *School of the Prophets: Yale College, 1702-1724*; Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century*; Miller, *The New England Mind*. Important resources on JE's reading are T.H. Johnson, 'Jonathan Edwards' background of reading', 193-222; and Peter Thuesen's (Ed.) forthcoming *The 'Catalogue', The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 27* (New Haven, Yale University Press).

<sup>76</sup> The historiography of seventeenth and eighteenth-century philosophy is in a period of revision at present, with results that are likely to lead to a more accurate conception of early American philosophy and therefore how we are to understand JE. Norman Fiering has argued that such revisions will evidence JE's thought to be far more nuanced, complex, and original, than simply denominated Rationalist or Empiricist, Malebranchean or Lockean ('The Rationalist Foundations of JE', 73-101).



philosophical thought in history is less a concern of this study, than the content of that thought.<sup>77</sup>

In the first of five chapters we explore what prompted Edwards' philosophical endeavors in the direction of a metaphysical reconception of reality. I propose that there were three major contributing factors: (1) his theological heritage; (2) the progressive intellectual climate of the Enlightenment that, in his eyes, both permitted and required a rejoinder from Christian orthodoxy; and, (3) by his own admission, his perspective-altering conversion experience of 1721. The first two factors have been subjects of several recent studies that have enriched our understanding of not only the cultural-historical milieu in which Edwards lived and worked, but also the intellectual forces that motivated his work.<sup>78</sup> Therefore I will concentrate my efforts on the third and, by Edwards' own admission, the most decisive factor, his conversion, or (perhaps better) his post-conversion theological vision, which I believe significantly influenced his philosophical experimentations in an effort to accommodate his 'new spiritual' worldview.

The first part of Chapter One examines this aspect of Edwards' own account of his conversion experience. The latter portions of the chapter explore how that event pressed a comprehensively God-centered 'vision' of reality upon his mind, which ultimately brought about a transformation in the way he conceived of God and reality.

In Chapter II I further reflect on those transformations and how Edwards employs them. His 'spiritual vision' of God revealed that the Divine Being was present in reality in knowledge, essence, and power. The knowledge he received from this vision (confirmed by the contents of Scripture) showed that God's presence was all encompassing, intentional, and fixed for particular 'ends' and even an 'ultimate end'. For Edwards, metaphysics would need to be orientated in a way that corresponded with God's telic and cosmologic relation to reality.

In this chapter I explain that Edwards managed and organized his telic and cosmologically affected metaphysics by subsuming the whole discussion under the rubrics of being and causation. By relegating all causal occurrences to God's power, Edwards ensures that the ends of creation—in every instance—will attain in full (that is, that they will be God-

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<sup>77</sup> Whether JE was modern in his thought really is no longer a point of dispute amongst scholars. Now the real questions are *how* modern was he, and in *what way*? Certainly JE was engaged with characteristic eighteenth-century intellectual issues—for example, empiricism, British moral philosophy, and the deistic controversy, which brought him to respond polemically to a number of European thinkers. To designate JE as a modern, however, is not to deny that he was influenced by the Scholastics.

<sup>78</sup> Such as the 'Editor's Introduction[s]' to the Yale edition of JE's *Works*; Copan, 'Jonathan Edwards's Philosophical Influences'; Holmes, *God of Grace*; Moody, 'Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment'; McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*; Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will*; Hoopes, *Consciousness in New England*; De Prospe, *Theism in the Discourse of Jonathan Edwards*; Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard*; Stevenson, 'The Ministerial and Theological Purposes of Jonathan Edwards's Thought'; Opie, (Ed.) *Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment*; and, Watts, 'Jonathan Edwards and the Cambridge Platonists'.



glorifying and contribute to the ‘ultimate’ end of creation). Precisely *how* God does this is by creating all things to function in a lawlike way. What ensures that such and such a thing always attains to God’s desired end(s) is its dispositional composition. God fashions, as it were, a network of existence that is composed of lawlike dispositional forces.

Yet God is also *in* those things in some way, namely, in ‘essence and power’. Moreover, whatever existence there may be is provided by the ‘only real being’ – God. It is God’s being that constitutes the matrix of reality. God, therefore, comprehends all existence, for His being is the ‘sum of all being’ and ‘the being of beings’, according to Edwards.

Sang Lee has given a great deal of attention to explaining Edwards’ reconception of metaphysical reality in terms of disposition, and provides detailed treatments of causality, material entities, and significantly, sentient beings. My work in this chapter attempts to further as well as correct some of Lee’s findings, and present a number of key concepts important for the ensuing discussions within Chapters III-V.

Chapter III offers a presentation of Edwards’ ontological conception of man, predicated upon his dispositional reconception of the ontological structure of the Trinity. This presentation shows, in response to the concerns of Michael McClymond and Stephen Holmes, how the ontological structure of every human being—including the unregenerate and reprobate—possess inherent God-glorifying principles.

The fourth chapter builds on the third by first considering how the logic of ontological disposition accounts for the transition of man from a state of concreatedness to fallenness, and even sin. Central to the discussion are the issues raised by Holmes concerning Edwards’ failure to provide a Trinitarian account for the creation and existence of the reprobate.

The Fall of Man brings with it both ontological and epistemological consequences for biblical Adam and his posterity. I argue in this chapter that the ontological status of sentient beings (determined by their relations) regulates how and what they can know. Focusing on the unregenerate natural-man, Edwards says that their fallen constitution (i.e. ‘carnal’ state of mind) prohibits extensive relations with God, neighbor, and nature. Consequently, they are specifically unable to cognize affectionally or perceive ‘true’ reality, which, according to Edwards, is pregnant with spiritual significance and purpose (i.e. God’s program of glorification). Despite his theological indictment of natural-men/reprobates, who categorically can do nothing to enhance their ontological status, Edwards insists that they can and do glorify God through certain epistemic perceptions.

In the fifth and final chapter, I offer a refutation of McDermott and Morimoto’s revisionist account of Edwards’ so-called soteriology of ‘ontological transformation’ and understanding of redemption history. In addition, we shall consider Edwards’ evangelistic engagement with



the unregenerate, as well as the reprobates' role in the history of the divine work of redemption.

Edwards, of course, was not just a philosopher-theologian, but also a Puritan minister. His whole professional career, save for two short months as the president of the College of New Jersey, was spent as a pastor or gospel missionary.<sup>79</sup> In that capacity he saw the dissemination of the word of God as the necessary and indispensable, yet insufficient, means of supernatural redeeming grace. Through the promotion of the gospel of Jesus Christ God 'ingathered' His elect from the world. Thus Edwards found it his duty to admonish the unregenerate to 'seek' and 'strive' for salvation in the hope that they might become non-meritorious recipients of mercy.

Despite his doctrine of double particular election, Edwards refined a strategy of sermon rhetoric, which, though sometimes minatorial, sometimes importunate, was in large part founded upon principles stemming from his dispositional ontology. His doctrine of preparation exemplifies this claim. It, like so many things, was affected by the way he attempted to convey the idea of God's direct interaction with the world. The idea he settled upon, and from which his theological method would emerge, was ultimately a linear 'historical' approach.

In *A History of the Work of Redemption*, Edwards rehearses God's work of redemption 'from the fall of man to the end of the world', and there we find that the natural-man and reprobate function, both at individual and collective levels, in a way that parallels repetitive stages in the work of redemption's constitutive history.<sup>80</sup> Just as the *historia salutis* develops along the lines of 'preparation', 'achievement', and 'application', so too the individual life is a microcosm of this work. For example, in a MS sermon on Rev. 14:15 (c.1743) Edwards writes, 'There are two kinds of persons that are here in this world in a preparatory state, elect and reprobates. Both are continued here in a state of preparation for an eternal state. Elect are here to be prepared [for heaven]. Reprobates are preparing [for hell]. They are ripening. And there are none [who] stand still, neither saints or sinners.' 'Achievement' for the elect is found in Christ, and for the reprobate in judgment. 'Application' for the elect is salvation and ultimately glorification, and for the reprobate damnation. The final function of the reprobate

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<sup>79</sup> The original College of New Jersey was renamed Princeton College and is not to be confused with the former Trenton State College, presently known as The College of New Jersey. JE's first ministerial charge was to a Presbyterian church in New York City (10 Aug. 1722 – 26 April 1723). This was followed by another short stint at a Congregational church in Bolton, Connecticut (July 1723– April 1724). After two years as a tutor at Yale College JE was invited to Northampton, Massachusetts, to assist his ailing grandfather, Solomon Stoddard. He arrived there in Sept. 1726, obtained settlement on 21 Nov., and was ordained 22 Feb. 1727. Following the death of Stoddard in 1729, JE remained the sole minister of the Northampton Church until the congregation voted for his removal in 1750. From 1751-57 he served as a missionary-pastor in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, to a few white settlers and the Housatonic and Mohawk Indians. He began his presidential duties at Princeton in January 1758. On 23 February, he was inoculated with an infected vaccine for smallpox and died 22 March 1758, age 54.

<sup>80</sup> 'Sermon One', *Works*9, 116.



in God's program of glorification is their destruction in hell, where they eternally replicate in their minds and resurrected bodies the power of God's wrath.

The 'heathen' nations also take part collectively in the grand scheme of redemption history. Their knowledge of certain religious truths serves to prepare former reprobate nations for the application of saving grace. Conversely, their present rejection of the Messiah accounts for Edwards' negative theological assessment, as he holds the natural-man fully culpable for failing in his epistemic (and by implication, moral and religious) responsibilities, ontological structure notwithstanding. Their place in redemption history is therefore twofold: to further the work of redemption for future generations and to replicate the punitive aspects of God's inner actuality.

Hence in this final chapter we find the natural-man and reprobate playing important roles in the advancement of the drama of redemption both prior and subsequent to the first advent, and in eternity. We also find that the logic of Edwards' dispositional ontology provides a certain amount of consistency concerning both his philosophical and theological treatment of human beings. The natural-man and reprobate alike possess intrinsic worth and functional value in God's program of self-glorification, not only in this life but in eternal life as well.

Although Jonathan Edwards ascribes inherent value to the natural-man and reprobate, yet our closing image of his philosophical-theology will be for some far from flattering. Plainly, God creates the reprobate to glorify Him in hell through the increased capacity of their minds: hence, the trinitarian nature of their eternal destruction. Justification of talk of Edwards' potential soteriological inclusivity simply is not there. Commentators will, therefore, have to take Edwards on his own restrictivist terms – however objectionable those terms may be. Internally, his theocentric philosophical-theology remains a coherent and cohesive piece: it (perhaps, uncomfortably) takes sin and punishment seriously, but also finds a place for them in God's beautiful and beautifying being. Such is the world according to Edwards' vision of reality in God.



## Chapter I

### Jonathan Edwards' Spiritual Vision of Reality

#### 1. Theological Parameters

1.a. From Timothy Edwards' Preparatory School to Yale College

1.b. A Failing Attempt at Enlightenment Methodology

#### 2. A *Personal Narrative* of the Vision of God

2.a. 'New Kind of Apprehensions' in a Unified Mind

2.b. The Spiritual Sense as 'New Simple Idea'

2.c. The Spiritual Sense as Epistemic Principle

2.d. The Spiritual Sense: An Ontological Principle

2.d.i. A New Disposition

#### 3. Comprehensive Theocentricity

3.a. The Beautiful Matrix of Divine Presence

3.b. 'EXCELLENCY'

3.c. Ideal Existence

3.d. Correspondence with Scripture

#### 4. Concluding Remarks



# I

## *Jonathan Edwards' Spiritual Vision of Reality*

The first instance that I remember of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things that I have lived much in since, was on reading those words [1Tim. 1:17] 'Now into the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen.' As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from any think I ever experienced before.

*Personal Narrative*

Like many philosophical theologians and systematicians throughout church history, Jonathan Edwards strove for a holistic Christian worldview that could make sense of seemingly disparate concepts such as the eternal and temporal realms, the unchangeableness of God and his creativity, and the relation of body and soul. Edwards attempted to accomplish a coherent and balanced understanding of God, the world, and the Christian faith through an innovative metaphysical reconception of the nature of reality in terms of ideas, dispositions, and relationality.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, he was a man of his time. The theological and ecclesiastical tradition in which he was nurtured, his eighteenth-century New England context, as well as his academic training at Yale College, ensured that whatever philosophical digressions he might take God would be (at least in theory) providentially involved in causality, while special revelation in the form of the Bible would be the infallible repository of truth for matters soteriological and ethical. Nonetheless, in the spirit of the time, Edwards remained open to new ideas about how to articulate confessional divinity over-against the challenges of the Enlightenment.

But for him to do justice to his Puritan upbringing and theological tradition *while* engaging the ideas of the Enlightenment he had to overcome a number of difficulties. The intellectual climate in Europe had changed radically during the seventeenth century, and was beginning to influence the way New Englanders thought. In Europe, professed adherents to the church and its creeds—whether Catholic or Protestant—quickly learned that philosophy could be done, indeed was being done, without God and His redeeming purposes in the foreground. Heliocentricity, radical advances in astronomy, the transmission of knowledge, the proliferation of the tools and reliable methods of science, advances in algebra and geometry by François Viète and René Descartes, the discovery of calculus by Leibniz and Newton, the harnessing and mechanization of everything from physics to biology, led men like Descartes and Spinoza in attempts to reduce metaphysics to mathematical form. The days of Aquinas and the Scholastics were over: God drifted into the background. Descartes and

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, 'Edwards on God and Nature' in *Edwards in Our Time*, eds. Lee and Guelzo, 15-45.



Locke, for example, found ways to work through (or develop!) problems in philosophy that placed God in a secondary or derivative role. God became the guarantor of what were primary epistemological concerns. There was an intellectual paradigm shift: philosophers no longer were discussing the issues of divine and ecclesiastical authority or the particulars that constituted the doctrines of God and salvation. Reason was now final arbiter in matters of politics, morality, and religion, and the human knower took center-stage. The examination in Job 38-42 was reversed: man was scrutinizing God; revelation had to answer to reason. One might say Enlightenment thought (such that represented non-orthodox Christian religion) had hijacked eschatology – man *had* come of age.<sup>2</sup>

Yale College, where Edwards was attending, knew all this well enough. The pervasive effects of the seventeenth-century rebirth of philosophy upon Christian thought brought far-reaching consequences—consequences that crept ashore in New England in the form of heterodoxical or heretical ideas, books, and pamphlets. Without rehearsing the story of this well documented epoch in modern history, suffice it to say that many churchmen in the British Isles gave themselves to the Enlightenment project and began to examine theology, ecclesiology, and Christian ethics under the rubric of rational investigation. Within New England, churchmen therefore watched with a close eye the transformations taking place within Anglicanism and liberal Presbyterianism, where certain ecclesiastics in England and Scotland abandoned creedal formulas and Reformation theology in favor of a naturalized, reasonable, and moral-theory laden religion. They feared that in some church circles theism had already given way to deism. And while the scientific discoveries of the Enlightenment could not be ignored in America, but were in fact hailed by the likes of Cotton Mather, yet the question of *how* a mechanical and calculable universe, characterized by efficient laws, could be sufficiently reconciled with Christianity's supernaturalism and its disputed epistemological source, revelation, as well as Calvinism's particularism, remained a perplexing difficulty. Simply asserting classical dogma was doing little in the way of persuasion: the communion of saints was shrinking and fragmenting, while skeptics and deists multiplied.

Whatever the final answers might be for the dilemma and whatever forms it might take, one thing was certain: Edwards' theological tradition would insist upon the prominence of God in metaphysics and moral philosophy. It was the framework within which the philosophically minded young Edwards would have to work or risk jeopardizing his covenant faith and heritage – something his intellectual training and family nurturing fortified him against.

In the final year of his graduate studies (1722), the recently converted Edwards surveyed the Enlightenment's intellectual landscape with a 'new spiritual sense'. With or without this

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it has been remarked elsewhere, time and again, that the Augustinian '*illuminatio*' (the Holy Spirit within man) was reconceived by what I am calling 'Enlightenment religion' as man's self-illumination. The self-authorization of the human intellect now sought its reason, neither in God's character nor His nature nor His revelation, but in itself alone.



sense he would have encountered the skeptical and even hostile intellectual current of many Enlightenment thinkers toward traditional, supernatural Christianity. To Edwards, and many like him, the threat to Christian orthodoxy from Enlightenment philosophers and unorthodox clergy went beyond the skeptical rationalization of the miracles of supernaturalism. At stake was the truth of the immediacy of God's activity, that is, His immanence and relevance.<sup>3</sup>

But having read Newton's published treatises and even after finding 'more Satisfaction and Pleasure in studying [Locke], than the most greedy Miser,'<sup>4</sup> Edwards nonetheless concluded that the God of orthodox subordinate standards such as the *Westminster Confession* and the *Savoy Declaration* did not need to be redefined (let alone denied) to accommodate the changing intellectual tides of man. Yet, at the same time, he maintained that neither should the many supernatural themes of the Bible cause the Christian believer to repudiate the newfound discovery of an apparently mechanistic natural realm. Nor should the believer dispense with faith when pitted against the common sense of reason. Edwards was convinced that both the natural and supernatural could be compatibly affirmed.<sup>5</sup>

In his mind, the requisite change lay neither in the science of God nor in the physical sciences, but in the prevailing perception of reality held by the church: a philosophical conception which he was convinced languished under the assault of Enlightenment reason armed with the tools of science, and could no longer maintain reasonable value in the hostile marketplace of ideas. He thought a spiritually informed conception of reality, which respected the findings of science and stood in awe of the God of Israel, could compatibly unite the increasingly polarized realms of historic Christianity and Enlightenment reason. The reconception that Edwards proposed was above all the product of a 'new vision' of God, in which all things were entirely dependent upon God and God was immanently present in all things.

According to Edwards' new aesthetic and theocentric vision and the ontic, telic, and cosmic conclusions he draws from it, all created existences derive their being from God's 'comprehension' of reality: for all reality is directly related to, encompassed by, and derived from, God Himself. For Edwards, the Enlightenment antithesis between the natural and the supernatural is false: God is immanently relevant.

Through this perception of reality, where the 'fullness' of the Divine Being extends into and in fact constitutes the ontic matrix of the created order, Edwards mediates, as it were, between inflexible permanent actuality and progressive reality. God, for him, is intensely

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<sup>3</sup> McDermott states that the most celebrated debates of the Enlightenment were 'contests between rival portraits of God'. 'The real disagreement,' he says, 'was not about whether God existed, or whether or not belief in his existence was essential to healthy polity (nearly all believed that it was), but about the nature of goodness and justice—and, consequently, the nature of God' (*Confronts the Gods*, 17-18).

<sup>4</sup> Hopkins, *Life and Character*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Works* 16, 355-56 and Anderson, 'EI', *Works* 6, 8-23, 42-43. JE's work with and within the parameters of Newtonian science has been well documented. See Faust, 'Jonathan Edwards as a Scientist', 393-404; Hornberger, 'The Effect of the New Science upon the Thought of Jonathan Edwards', 190-207; and especially Anderson, 'EI', *Works* 6.



personal and immediately present in human affairs, thoughts, and time. To Edwards this was not only reasonable and apparent in Scripture, but also epistemically justifiable by a philosophy of spiritual perception. Whereas Enlightenment rationalists tended to sever God from created reality and Baruch Spinoza naturalized God through his pantheism, Edwards proposes a *via media* with his theory of ‘spiritually perceiving’ God’s ‘comprehensiveness’.

This chapter argues that the ‘vision’ of ‘God as God is in Himself’, which coincided with Edwards’ conversion experience, significantly advanced his consideration of God’s direct relation to everything. That is, that his philosophy of the ‘spiritual sense’ resulted in a doctrine of ‘Divine comprehensiveness’. For Edwards, God’s ‘comprehension’ of reality meant more than omniscience; it also meant that God immediately envelops all existence. Upon further reflection he discovers a ‘theocentricity of ends’ or metaphysics of finality. This suggested that God’s immanent presence was purposed to specific ends, and that reality itself was designed to attain those ends at every moment. God’s subordinate ends were manifold but culminated in one ‘ultimate end’ of consummate divine self-glorification.

Unlike Calvin and Luther, whose discussions on the being of God were conditioned by a fundamental rejection of speculation about ‘God in Himself’ (*Deus apud se*) in favor of God in His revelation toward us (*Deus erga nos*),<sup>6</sup> Edwards asserts that God revealed in the spiritual encounter does not differ from God in Himself, and neither does that revelatory encounter eclipse or usurp Scripture, but rather confirms and merges with it.

According to his autobiographical *Personal Narrative* it was upon his conversion—the point at which Edwards received the celebrated ‘new sense’—at which he began to ‘view’ and therefore contemplate reality anew. To be sure, Edwards was trained to contemplate reality with God at its center, but the challenges of Enlightenment made it difficult for him to conceive of God’s interaction with the world in merely a traditionally confessional way. ‘Spiritual perception’, however, brought about a different perspective on reality and his confessional faith. God was really more dynamically present than his theological heritage had articulated. God was at the center of not only world history and, of course, soteriology, but literally ‘everything’ was pregnant with some spiritual aspect of God’s presence, purpose, and design, in a word, ‘excellence’ – if only one could ‘sense’ it. God-at-the-center-of-reality was articulated by God’s comprehensiveness, which, in turn, was later elucidated by disposition.

Edwards articulates God’s comprehensiveness in two ways: in metaphysical and aesthetic terms of being and excellency, and theologically. In this chapter we concentrate on the former.

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<sup>6</sup> Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, 1:405.



## 1. *Theological Parameters*

Edwards' intellectual endeavors in the direction of a philosophical reconception of the nature of reality, where God was at center, were conditioned by three things in particular: his Reformed theological heritage which heavily emphasized the sovereignty of God, the progressive intellectual climate of the Enlightenment, and his conversion experience. Concerning the first of these, Edwards' theological instruction helped to train his mind to theoretically perceive the sovereign work of God in all the affairs of mankind. This of course did not necessitate a philosophical reconception of the nature of reality, but it did provide an overarching narrative by which events of the world could be interpreted: the meta-narrative of God's glorification. This too became an integral tenet of his theological learning.

After young Edwards arrived at Yale College<sup>7</sup> he was introduced to a wide array of Enlightenment thought: religious, scientific, and philosophical. He would either scrutinize or accommodate this 'new learning' with the heritage of his Calvinistic creed. While certain aspects of the creed would require rethinking in light of 'the new learning,' yet his traditional faith could not permit an alteration to the meta-narrative. If God and His self-glorification were not at center, then the foundation of classical Christianity would be jeopardized.

The combination of Edwards' elementary training in Calvinistic thought and a shifting intellectual climate in Europe, which had left a profound impact upon Christian thinking in England and was now encroaching upon New England, challenged him to rethink the philosophical moorings of his theological heritage, while at the same time preserving the non-negotiable aspects of the doctrine of God and Reformed theocentric worldview that he owned as orthodox. However, these two factors alone were not enough to commit Edwards to a philosophical reconception of the nature of reality. It was only subsequent to his conversion that his thinking became *radically* theocentric *and* aesthetic. Edwards testified that this experience resulted in a new perspective on reality, which in turn facilitated the possibility of understanding all things in relation to the reality of God's 'all-comprehensive being'.

By employing a typology of the 'pre- vs. post-conversion' perspectives of Edwards, I do not intend to suggest a drastic dichotomy in his conviction about Reformed theology. True, Edwards did confess to some reservations about certain Calvinistic doctrines prior to his conversion (e.g. the divine decrees), yet to say that his theology was not 'Reformed' prior to that event would be untenable.<sup>8</sup> Instead, I intend to accentuate a particular theme already present in his Reformed thought—*theocentricity*—and show how the 'vision' acquired at his conversion (1) broadened and spiritualized his perspective on reality so as to connect all

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<sup>7</sup> To be more precise, in 1716 JE matriculated into The Collegiate School of Connecticut, which was renamed Yale College in 1718 after Governor Elihu Yale.

<sup>8</sup> The few surviving papers that antedate his conversion give no indication that his theology was anything but Reformed: there is no pre-conversion anti-Reformed JE and a post-conversion Calvinistic JE.



things to God's self-glorifying immanent reality, (2) brought about a doctrine of divine 'comprehensiveness' and (3) a regulative principle of *telic*-theocentrism, within his system.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.a. *From Timothy Edwards' Preparatory School to Yale College*

Jonathan Edwards' theological training began in his childhood home.<sup>10</sup> The household which the Reverend Timothy Edwards managed assured that his children—ten daughters and son Jonathan—were thoroughly versed in the *Westminster Confession*, and, in particular, its *Shorter Catechism*. If their indoctrination into confessional Calvinism's monergistic soteriology did not ensure the enthronement of God and His self-glorifying purposes in their minds, they also were submersed into a culture of 'church-life' in which God seemed to encroach upon every aspect of their social and personal worlds.<sup>11</sup>

Through the catechism and mentoring of his father, Edwards learned the sovereignty of God in all the affairs of mankind. This was agreeable to the teaching of Calvin, Perkins, and the Westminster divines. His catechism's VI<sup>th</sup> chapter, 'Of Creation', stated that, 'It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, out of the nothing, the world, and all things therein whether visible or invisible.' The providences of God made that distant activity local and daily. God was immanent in the world through ordinary means, secondary causes, positive decrees, and, of course, the Holy Spirit. Through these channels God sovereignly implemented His will. Puritan theology strove to balance the Scholastic tendency to reify the God of Israel with doctrines that made the Divine proximate. Though the desired effect was not always achieved, particularly in the seventeenth century when Reformed Scholasticism rose to prominence, nonetheless, a concerted effort was made to forge a livable theology accessible and relevant to all, in all situations.<sup>12</sup> For example, Calvin's vocational theology was developed further, where each and every Christian, no matter what their occupation (save for scandalous employment), served God through the labor of their hands and minds.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Chapter II develops points '(2)' and '(3)'. Avihu Zakai likewise states that JE's conversion was determinant for the way he views and resolves certain issues ('The Conversion of Jonathan Edwards', 127-38). Compare also the comments by Jaroslav Pelikan: 'In his [JE's] "Personal Narrative" he confesses that, from his childhood on, his mind "had been full of objections" against the doctrine of predestination. Though he gradually worked through his intellectual objections, it was only with his conversion (early in 1721) that he came to a "new sense" of God's glory revealed in Scripture and in nature' ('Jonathan Edwards' in *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of World Religions*, gen. ed. Wendy Doniger, 314).

<sup>10</sup> See Anderson, 'EI', *Works* 6, 4-5; and Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758*, 40ff.

<sup>11</sup> Tarbox, 'Timothy Edwards and His Parishioners,' 256-74; Minkema, 'The Edwardses', *passim*.

<sup>12</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes*, III.10.6 and *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, 2:143. Jeremiah Burroughs, Thomas Watson, and John Owen, for example, are typical of Puritan handling of this doctrine in different settings. See Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* (London, 1648); Watson, *The Lord's Prayer in A Body of Practical Divinity* (London, 1692), esp. 210-16; and Owen, 'The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished' in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 13, ed. Goold.

<sup>13</sup> See Biéler, *The Social Humanism of Calvin*; and H.R. Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*.



The small revivals that broke out in his father's parish of East Windsor, Connecticut, left the younger Edwards with empirical evidence for God's sovereign handling of the souls of men and providential ordering of the universe. If there ever was any difficulty in Edwards seeing God present in, say, 'the wondrous and curious works of the spider', there certainly was none when it came to the 'remarkable stirring and pouring out of the Spirit of God' during times of revival.<sup>14</sup> In these ways, young Edwards was intellectually conditioned to link his environment and circumstances to the sovereign activity of God.

After training in his father's preparatory school, twelve-year-old Edwards entered the Connecticut Collegiate School (Yale College) in 1716. In New Haven, as at Harvard, instruction in Christian doctrine was part of the weekly curriculum. Chief pedagogical figures were the Reformed theologian Johannes Wollebius and Puritan divine William Ames, former pupil of William Perkins, all of whom emphasized the unity of all truth as God's truth, as well as God's predestination of man and terrestrial events for His own glory.<sup>15</sup> Edwards also was required to recite his *Shorter Catechism* weekly. This exercise appears to have reinforced his earlier doctrinal convictions and secured their retention throughout his life.<sup>16</sup> In addition to these catechetical rehearsals there was Bible reading, the attending of divine services, the recitation of sermons, and personal examinations. As his 'Diary' and 'Resolutions' reveal, Bible study and self-examinations were to become central elements in his devotional life following his conversion.<sup>17</sup>

Calvinistic religious instruction and exercises, then, did not stop with the commencement of his collegiate career, but were a vital part of it. Thus, from his youth throughout his New Haven sojourn, Edwards was trained in the art of acknowledging the sovereign and providential presence of God; so that, when he looked upon the wonders of God's creation he saw the 'wisdom' and 'exuberant goodness of the Creator'.

Following the donation of the so-called 'Dummer Library,' a catalogue of five hundred volumes given to Yale College in January 1713, the sleepy New England town of New Haven

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<sup>14</sup> 'To Judge Paul Dudley' and 'To Mary Edwards', *Works*16, 41, 29.

<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the apex of the Puritan's scholarly achievement was the production of 'technologia' – treatises that confidently employed the methods of reason and linguistic discourse to show how all truth was God's unified and harmonious truth. This method was the practical outcome of the logic of Peter Ramus. Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism*, 83. Cf. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*. Wollebius' *Compendium theologiae Christianae* (Basel, 1618), when translated into English (1626), became a popular textbook in Scotland and New England. Ames' *Medulla SS. theologica* (Amsterdam, 1623) and *Theses logicae* (Leyden, 1633) were required texts at Yale in JE's day. Perkins' famous work on predestination was 'A Golden Chaine' (*Workes Perkins* 1:9-116). All are listed in JE's 'Catalogue.'

<sup>16</sup> In a letter to John Erskine (July 5, 1750), JE (then age 48) wrote: 'As to my subscribing to the Westminster Confession, there would be no difficulty' (*Works*16, 355).

<sup>17</sup> *Works*6, 155. I am indebted to Iain H. Murray's *New Biography*, 31, for the details of devotional life at Yale College.



became an intellectual center for scrutinizing the ideas of Europe, particularly Britain.<sup>18</sup> It was through this collection that Edwards encountered Locke's *Essay*, Newton's *Principia Mathematica* and *Optics*, the works of Bacon and Descartes, Nicolas Malebranche's *Search after Truth*, (Malebranche's disciple) John Norris' *Essay towards the Theory of the Ideal and Intelligible World*, and several works of the Cambridge Platonists, most notably those of Henry More and John Smith, who were to have an early and lasting influence on Edwards' thought.<sup>19</sup>

Yale Rector Timothy Cutler and tutors Samuel Johnson and Elisha Williams<sup>20</sup> skillfully introduced to their pupils these intellectual innovations of Europe in a manner that complemented their theological system.<sup>21</sup> The collection was sifted; cautions and warnings were issued about authors *x* and *y*, ideas *p* and *q*; while the neutral or positive portion of the 'Dummer Catalogue' was harmonized with 'orthodox' Christian thought, disseminated, and celebrated.<sup>22</sup> Edwards and his classmates were then taught that the nomic regularity of the universe was agreeable with the immutability of God, its geometric calculability with divine cosmology, and so on. The more adventuresome and advanced graduate students would independently learn that Malebranche helped preserve the viability of miracles as well as divine agency in causation through the doctrine of occasionalism, and that Locke, through his monumental analysis of human knowledge, helped in the assessment of the noetic effects of sin upon the intellectual powers of man. At least this is how the Yale trustees hoped the 'new

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<sup>18</sup> The story is a bit more complicated. Coinciding with JE's 1716 matriculation, a controversy arose concerning the permanent site for the Collegiate School, which prior to 1716 abode in Saybrook. The majority of the Trustees voted for New Haven, where a new hall was to be built to house the students, faculty and 'Dummer Collection' library. But as Anderson explains, 'the two dissenting trustees from Hartford, who were determined to secure the college for their own town, appealed to the Assembly to overturn the majority decisions' ('EI', *Works* 6, 7). This divided the scholars into two main groups: one residing in New Haven, the others under self-appointed tutors in Wethersfield. JE belonged to the latter group, which remained in Wethersfield through his sophomore year. In 1718, the 'Dummer Collection' was brought down to New Haven from Saybrook. Prior to that time the new collection was in use for over a year, or from the start of JE's sophomore year. In March 1719, the scholars from Wethersfield were reunited with the New Haven scholars, but only after displacing Samuel Johnson from his position as tutor and effecting the instillation of Timothy Cutler. JE thus spent part of his junior year and all of his senior year in New Haven. See Richard Warch's rehearsal of this period in Yale's history in *School of Prophets: Yale College, 1701-1733*, cc. 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> See Bryant and Paterson, 'The List of Books Sent From England by Jeremiah Dummer' (432-92), for an inventory of the Dummer collection. Cf. Pratt, 'The Books Sent from England ... to Yale College', 7-44. Anderson provides biographical information and discussion about the writers whose works in this collection are relevant to JE ('EI', *Works* 6, 7-27). Cf. Miller, *The New England Mind*, 95-124.

<sup>20</sup> Cutler, who replaced Johnson, would, along with Johnson and another Yale tutor, Daniel Brown, 'defect' to episcopacy (Anglicanism). In New England, this was tantamount to embracing Arminianism (a case of guilt by association): hence its familiar designation in the annals of history as 'The Great Apostasy.' Williams, however, would come to serve as rector from 1726-39.

<sup>21</sup> By account records, JE himself seems to have received the majority of his undergraduate instructions in Wethersfield from tutors Samuel Smith and Samuel Hall; and in New Haven, Williams, though Cutler supervised his senior year ('To the Revd Timothy Edwards', *Works* 16, 33). Brown and Cutler oversaw his graduate work. Cf. Anderson, 'EI', *Works* 6, 7-27, esp. 7-11.

<sup>22</sup> H. Schneider and C. Schneider, (eds.), *Samuel Johnson*, 1:8-9. This is Samuel Johnson of Stratford, Connecticut.



learning' would be employed. Caveats and catechesis were not mere formalities of procedure at Yale—they established the boundaries of truth in an age of growing skepticism, deism and atheism.<sup>23</sup>

Students were also made aware of the fact that many ministers and theologians, since the grand rise of humanism, had succumbed to the temptation to understand the Christian faith in light of the dogmas of the Enlightenment, rather than the Enlightenment in the light of the dogmas of the Christian faith. Accordingly, the centerpieces of seventeenth-century Scholastic theology represented in the 'Dummer Catalogue' by the works of Stephen Charnock, John Edwards, Edward Stillingfleet, and others, were commended as fine blends of the strength of reason in the power of faith.<sup>24</sup> If theology had to be done in the midst of 'the new learning', College authorities admonished, then it should be done not only conscious of the potential benefits of Enlightenment ideas, but also their dubious nature. Either way, theology was always to be done with eminent respect to their confessional tradition.

In retrospect we have every reason to believe that Edwards took this counsel seriously: his provincial upbringing in the East Windsor parsonage, catechetical instruction, and collegiate tutelage were effective. He imbibed the Enlightenment's rationalistic method, garnered its ideas, and yet was repulsed by the use of reason against historic Christianity. Particularly abhorrent to Edwards were not so much the Charles Blount and John Toland types, 'professed infidels' who assailed the faith from without, as those who were wreaking havoc from within.<sup>25</sup> To be sure, Edwards considered Blount, Toland, Hobbes, Anthony Collins, and others, as 'deistical' enemies of the faith,<sup>26</sup> but his chief worry was how men from within the church—influenced by those 'outside' the church—were naturalizing his tradition's historic and supernatural faith. Leaders within the church who had become engaged with Enlightenment ideologies regarding revealed religion, particularly Christianity, whether they were in ecclesiastical office or academic chair, had one of two options according to Edwards: they could either apostatize or combat Enlightenment religion and thereby strengthen and purify the house of faith. Edwards, of course, chose the latter.<sup>27</sup>

He first encountered 'apostate clerics' the same way he met Locke and More – through the 'Dummer Catalogue,' which harbored some of the dreaded heresies that were 'plaguing' the British Isles. Numbered among the distrusted books were Daniel Whitby's *Discourse on*

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<sup>23</sup> Smyth, 'The "New Philosophy" Against which Students at Yale College Were Warned in 1714', 242-60; Ellis, *The New England Mind in Transition*, cc. 4-5.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Charles Leslie, *A Short and Easy Method with the Deists* (London, 1697/8).

<sup>25</sup> *Works*9, 432.

<sup>26</sup> *Banner-Works* 2:479, 485, 496. Sullivan (*John Toland and the Deist Controversy*, 212-15) and McDermott (*Confronts the Gods*, 19-21) point out the historiographical problem of categorizing these men as 'deists'. Yet, notwithstanding the denials of 'deism' by Blount, Toland, and Collins, we may accept the label as a general designation for those who, based on reason, 'common sense,' and nature, repudiate special revelation and divine immanence in favor of a naturalized religion or morality.

<sup>27</sup> 'To the Rev. Thomas Gillespie', *Works*16, 224-35.



*the Five Points* and John Tillotson's *Sermons*.<sup>28</sup> Edwards read these and was scandalized. Samuel Johnson's 1715 warning that 'the new philosophy would bring a new divinity'<sup>29</sup> came a half century too late for England; but in New England there was still hope that aspiring ministers, such as Edwards, would use 'the new learning' to the advantage of orthodoxy.

### 1.b. *A Failing Attempt at Enlightenment Methodology*

While critical of heretical or dissonant ideas, young Edwards nonetheless remained in favor of the intellectual methods employed by Enlightenment thinkers, especially Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury. Edwards considered Shaftesbury's style and power of reasoning worthy of imitation,<sup>30</sup> though Shaftesbury was no friend to Reformed theology. Whether friend or foe to his faith Edwards gleaned ideas and methods from a host of English, Scottish, and Continental minds, while striving to the best of his ability to *rationaly* present a Christian worldview in consonance with Newtonian science. After all, the brightest and most able Christian thinkers rationally defended and promoted the faith. Of such were William Ames and Alexander Richardson, Charles Leslie and Richard Bentley, and the Dutch Calvinist logicians Franco Burgersdicius and Adrian Heereboord.<sup>31</sup> Even in New England, Cotton Mather undertook to show that philosophy and natural science were not enemies, but 'mighty and wondrous incentives to religion.'<sup>32</sup>

Edwards found the Cambridge Platonists particularly exemplary. While Francis Bacon drew a sharp distinction between reason and faith, Benjamin Whichcote critically replied that 'reason is the voice of God.'<sup>33</sup> Both Ralph Cudworth and Henry More joined the attack on Bacon, but concentrated their efforts refuting Hobbes' materialism. More, above all, took seriously the findings of the new science, contended against the materialism and mechanical determinations of Hobbes and the mechanistic pretensions of the Cartesians and, in return, received Edwards' admiration and imitation through a short essay entitled 'Of Atoms'. Although the Cambridge Platonists for the most part resisted Calvinism as dogmatic, irrational, and therefore opposed to the true interests of both religion and morality, yet their strong 'sense of divinity' seemed to Edwards the most immediate testimony of reason. In his untested eyes the blend of a sincere defense of Christianity through a life of devotion armed

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<sup>28</sup> Whitby's *Discourse on the Five Points* (along with Chubb's *A Collection of Tracts* [London, 1730]) was the focus of JE's sustained attack on Arminianism and deism in *FW*. JE refutes Tillotson in 'The Eternity of Hell Torments' (1739), and calls him a 'great figure among the new fashioned divines'.

<sup>29</sup> Schneider and Schneider, (eds.), *Samuel Johnson*, 1:4.

<sup>30</sup> Hence the recognizable similarity between JE's logic and form of expression and that indicative of Enlightenment thinkers – be it moral or philosophical or scientific writers. 'Rule of Style' No.15 (of 21), cover of MS 'Notes on Natural Science' (c.1722), Beinecke Library.

<sup>31</sup> See Richardson, *Providence and Precept* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London, 1691); Bentley, *The Folly of Atheism, and ... deism* (London, 1692) and *Remarks upon a late Discourse of free-thinking* (5<sup>th</sup>ed. London, 1716); Burgersdicius, *Institutio Logicae* (Leyden, 1626); Heereboord, *Ερμηνεία Logica* (London, 1658).

<sup>32</sup> *The Christian Philosopher* (London, 1721) cited in Anderson, 'EI', *Works*6, 38.

<sup>33</sup> Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms* (Norwich and London, 1703), 76.



with a confidence in *reason* (the true *imago Dei*) was the most commendable approach for confessional Calvinism's engagement with Enlightenment thought.<sup>34</sup>

Young Edwards then thought, perhaps sophomorically, to make rational that which the 'Enlightened world' and even the Cambridge Platonists opposed in Calvinism, namely, the relation between God, morality, and creedal soteriology. With regard to God's operating in an 'arbitrary' manner, he later confessed in his *Personal Narrative* that he, too, questioned and doubted the doctrines of predestination and absolute sovereignty.<sup>35</sup> At this time, however, he more comfortably followed the lead of Whichcote and his Cambridge disciples, who strenuously argued that God was essentially rational – like man.<sup>36</sup> Edwards found in the Cambridge Platonists a suitable compromise with the spirit of the Enlightenment: since it is unreasonable to suppose God an irrational being (which is to say, God is a perfectly rational being), then 'All God's methods of dealing with men [must be] most reasonable.'<sup>37</sup> Thus, Christianity itself, as he was convinced of it within his tradition, must be reasonable and therefore (in the words of Henry More) 'the deepest and choicest piece of philosophy.'<sup>38</sup>

Early attempts at a rational presentation of a presumably 'informed' Christian worldview are evident in Edwards' scant pre-conversion writings. For instance, in his earliest extant sermon (late 1720?), Edwards places a repeated emphasis upon man as a 'reasonable being' characterized by rational capacity. Conspicuously missing in this almost academic lecture are the accent on affections, the aesthetic vision of divine things, and a candid depiction of Calvinistic anthropology, which habitually hallmark his later theology. Instead, the premium rests on rationality: 'God always deals with men as reasonable creatures, and every [word] in the Scriptures speaks to us as such.'<sup>39</sup>

The prominence of reason and the absence of affections continue in his next two extant sermons. Probably drafted for purposes of candidating, the doctrines of depravity and hell torments surface in these 'showcase' sermons. However, in 'The Value of Salvation' (c.1721) he juxtaposes the body and corporeal beauty with the soul and spiritual things, *not* in a way that reflects his later Hutchesonian distinction between secondary (material) and primary (spiritual) beauty, but as a dichotomy. Likewise, 'Wicked Men's Slavery to Sin' shares with other pre-conversion sermons an essential optimism in linking innate reason and religion, and,

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<sup>34</sup> Simon Patrick and Cudworth were also members of the Royal Society with More. Peter Sterry and Nathanael Culverwel, despite the latitudinarian beliefs they shared with the other Cambridge Platonists, were professed Calvinists. To be sure, 'true religion' for Whichcote, Smith, More, Cudworth, etc., did not mean the same thing as what JE meant by 'true religion'. Still, JE did share in their enthusiasm for defending the existence of God, immortality and value of the human soul, the existence of the spirit activating the natural world, and finally, their emphasis upon the correspondence between the rational and divine. Cf. Weyer's biographical references in *Die Cambridge Platonists*, 167-81.

<sup>35</sup> *PN, Works*16, 791-92. Cf. 'M'654, *Works*18, 196.

<sup>36</sup> *Aphorisms*, 76. See Cragg, (Ed.) *The Cambridge Platonists*, 11.

<sup>37</sup> 'Christian Happiness' (c.1720), *Works*10, 300; *Works*14, 167.

<sup>38</sup> More, *Divine Dialogue* (London, 1668), 5.

<sup>39</sup> 'Christian Happiness' (c.1720), *Works* 10, 296.





as Wilson Kimnach points out, ‘his insistence that sin is somehow beneath man, or a kind of morbidity, clearly indicates his exalted conception of man’s potential for real virtue.’<sup>40</sup>

The deficiency of the aesthetic and affectional dimensions of his pre-conversion theology is therefore significant. In his attraction to arguments of ‘reasonableness’ and rational methodology, Edwards attempts to present creedal Calvinism according to the rules and even ideas of the Enlightenment itself. Interestingly, he unwittingly sets reason over-against an ontologically grounded revelation. That is, he permits the knowledge of Christian revelation to be pried from its source—God—in which there was a necessity intrinsic in revelation to the real (i.e. God) to be founded upon something ineffably arbitrary, namely, a rational metaphysics. In accord with Jesuit philosophical theologian Francisco Suárez (1548-1617), Edwards suggests that one could recognize the positive fact of revealed truth (a Biblical proposition), before assenting to it. No longer did revelation disclose God in His divine nature; instead it concerns pieces of information that God has decided to impart, which even the spiritually unaltered mind is capable of fully comprehending. Accordingly, in these early sermons Edwards sounds as uncompromisingly innatist as the Cambridge Platonists: human reason has inherited immutable intellectual, moral, and religious notions ‘sufficient in our sense,’ which when fêted depreciates other epistemological sources. For example, Edwards maintains in these sermons that the doctrines of final judgment, depravity, hell, and the immortality of the soul, are evidenced and can be appreciated *as* divine truths by the human reasoning of natural law.<sup>41</sup>

These early writings display Edwards’ confidence that even his confessional theology (with the role of predestination diminished) could be argued and presented ‘according to reason’. In his naïveté, he hardly offers a convincing presentation of his choice of Christian doctrines, let alone critically engages the ideas of the Enlightenment. Instead, he only mimics its methods. Perhaps the best example of this is his graduate student attempt to refute metaphysical materialism with an atomistic approach borrowed directly from Henry More. More stated that bodies were ‘impenetrable’, ‘a perfect solidity’ of ‘resistance’ from annihilation: in ‘Of Atoms’, so did Edwards. It would appear that Edwards’ innovation lay in the claim that *God* was the power that causes infinite resistance, but More said it first.<sup>42</sup> One might even say that the God-centeredness present in this essay is altogether subservient to his ‘rational’ agenda. This again would show the influence of the Cambridge Platonists upon Edwards. Their ‘*Appeal to the Naturall faculties of the Minde of man, whether there be not a God*’ and Edwards’ proposed ‘A Rational Account of the Main Doctrines of the Christian Religion Attempted’ hardly would appear distinguishable in terms of methodology and

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<sup>40</sup> Kimnach, (Ed.) ‘Wicked Men’s Slavery to Sin’ (c.1720), *Works*10, 338.

<sup>41</sup> ‘The Importance of a Future State’ (c.1722), *Works*10, 360.

<sup>42</sup> More, *An Antidote Against Atheism* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London, 1655). To be fair, JE did press the conclusion further than More by saying that God was therefore ‘*Ens Entium*’.



emphasis.<sup>43</sup> Not that Edwards distances himself from the parameters of his theological tradition (save for his private cavils over predestination) or aligns himself with Enlightenment religion, it is just that at this point he does not have a clear vision of ‘God-at-the-center-of-reality’ other than soteriologically, and even that only with reservations. Hence, the total absence of the aesthetic language of ‘excellency’, ‘sweetness’, ‘beauty,’ as well as the distinguishing full theocentric indicators ‘glory’, ‘fitness’, and ‘arbitrary’ which, after this period, are used to explain the divinity of not just the Christian religion but morality, existence, and the natural order.

Although his studies in the arts at Yale would have made correlations to God’s presence or design or beauty (exemplifying the ‘technologia’), yet at this time Edwards seems to indicate an inability to apprehend intuitively such realities without the tools of logic and rational induction. Later for him, the arts, sciences, and philosophy ideally would have no separate status from theology: as they become more perfect, he would argue, they ‘issue in divinity, and coincide with it, and appear to be a part of it.’<sup>44</sup> At this time, however, save for ‘Of Atoms’, his writings in the natural sciences, along with his philosophical composition ‘Of the Prejudices of Imagination’, make no reference to ‘God’ whatsoever. Even the original draft of the ‘Spider letter’ (‘Of Insects’) contains only two token corollaries in which God, almost as an afterthought, is tangentially acknowledged and prosaically referred to as ‘the Creator’.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, while Edwards found the rational argumentation and methodological presentation ‘agreeable’, and Enlightenment religion ‘the opposition that Satan has made against the Reformation’, yet his writings prior to the spring of 1721 and the testimony of his *Personal Narrative* reveal that he did not possess that all-encompassing theocentric and spiritual worldview ‘by which I was brought to those new dispositions, and that new sense of things, that I have since had.’ He admitted that his profession of Christianity prior to his conversion, while theologically informed, was only theoretical. Later he would call this type of engagement with religion ‘notional’ or ‘speculative’, due to an inability to ‘spiritually perceive’ the ‘divinity’ and ‘reality’ of the truths of Scripture and God’s presence in the world.<sup>46</sup>

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Prior to his conversion experience Edwards offers no new insights to any field, much less philosophy or theology, save for some observations in the sphere of ‘natural philosophy’.

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<sup>43</sup> Full title of More’s *Antidote*; *Works6*, 396.

<sup>44</sup> *Works6*, 397.

<sup>45</sup> As Anderson notes, the practice of making charitable inferences to the providential or creative involvement of God in natural phenomena by scientists and scientific writers was commonplace in JE’s day (‘EI’, *Works6*, 48). It would not have been unusual for JE to add such corollaries. My point is that JE’s earliest ‘religious’ corollaries may have been out of respect to convention, rather than intentional theological or teleological improvements. The original composition of the ‘Spider Letter’ occurred at Yale around 1719/20, and was later drafted in JE’s ‘public’ hand (1723) in hope of publication.

<sup>46</sup> See *Religious Affections*, *Works2*, passim.



Although he desired to address the heterodoxical innovations entering the Christian religion by Enlightenment proposals and, perhaps, took an initial step toward that goal with the composition ‘Of Atoms’, yet he could not think of any other way to do so while taking advantage of the ‘new learning’ and remaining true to his theological heritage other than by arguing for the observable and innate reasonableness of Christianity.<sup>47</sup>

Once he began to have ‘a new kind of apprehensions and ideas’ of God and His glory, in which his ‘sense of divine things gradually increased,’ then he began to interpret reality in light of the presence of ‘divine glory’ in ‘everything.’<sup>48</sup> To be sure, God-at-the-center-of-reality was essential to his understanding the world, but a certain dynamic element about that reality hitherto failed to resonate with him, namely, a sensible vision of it.

For whatever other intangible reasons, Edwards explains that it was the pivotal event of his conversion that engendered a ‘new spiritual sense’, which, in turn, harnessed his confessional theology and enthusiasm/abhorrence for Enlightenment reason/ideas and brought about a shift in perspective and theological emphasis. In turn, the alteration of his worldview affected a shift in philosophical categories that would have far-reaching implications upon his interpretation of reality over-against the unorthodox innovations of the Enlightenment.

## 2. A Personal Narrative of the Vision of God

Jonathan Edwards dates his own conversion to ‘about a year and a half’ before August 1722, which we can narrow to May or June 1721.<sup>49</sup> His *Personal Narrative* does not reveal the exact process of his conversion, not because he wrote it almost twenty years after from the event, but because he consciously intended to distance himself from the Puritan ‘step-model’ conversion.<sup>50</sup> According to that ‘preparationist’ model, he need only chart his progress from one standardized element of subjective phenomena—conviction by ‘legal fear,’ terrors leading to contrition, humiliation, etc.—to another, in order to ascertain the moment the final

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<sup>47</sup> Indeed, as Anderson comments: ‘... his main conclusions—that matter neither exists nor acts by itself, but depends immediately on the immaterial divine Being—were to remain fixed centers of his thought. These conclusions relate to the doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty in the moral and spiritual world, which Edwards came to accept at the time of his conversion’ (‘EI’, *Works*6, 26).

<sup>48</sup> *Works*9, 432; *PN*, *Works*16, 790.

<sup>49</sup> None of JE’s personal letters prior to May/June 1721 indicate anything of this momentous personal event. His *Diary* began Dec. 18, 1722.

<sup>50</sup> See JE’s exposition of ‘Part II. Showing No Certain Signs of Truly Gracious Affections’ Sign No.8: ‘Nothing can certainly be determined concerning the nature of the affections by this, that comforts and joys seem to follow awakenings and convictions of conscience, in a *certain order*’ (*RA*, *Works*2, 151-58, 161-62). Claghorn describes the *PN* as JE’s ‘extended historical account of his own spiritual journey [which] may have been written in response to a request from his future son-in-law Aaron Burr’ in Dec. 1740 (*Works*16, 747). The structured *PN* is reflective of the genre of didactic Puritan autobiographies, and contrasts the pessimistic self-examinations indicative of his *Diary*, again, characteristic of its literary genre. See Shea, ‘The Art and Instruction of Jonathan Edwards’s *Personal Narrative*’, 299-311; and Paul D. Johnson, ‘Jonathan Edwards’s “Sweet Conjunction”’, 270-81.



step of preparation yielded in regeneration. Such steps, however, were conspicuously missing from his experience.<sup>51</sup>

To be sure, he remained part of a Calvinist and Pietist tradition that had long occupied itself with analysis of the conversion experience, and had inherited the relatively conventional scheme of conversion by steps.<sup>52</sup> But almost immediately after his atypical conversion, Edwards became troubled by the determined parameters of the ‘step’ or ‘phasing’ model. His conversion was more of an *event*, or in Edwards’ words, ‘a *delightful* conviction’ of the ‘sense of divinity’ of the Christian religion, rather than a traceable transition from one typical stage to another. He attributed the alteration in his attitude toward the sovereignty of God and the reality of divine things not to a predicable passing from one phase to the next, but a sudden ‘sense of the glory of the divine being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before.’<sup>53</sup>

His experience eclipsed the merely emotional and fleeting subjective sensations of fear or joy. As Edwards describes it, his was an almost ecstatic experience that converged on a conscious ‘new sense’ of ‘the *supreme holy beauty* and comeliness of divine things, as they are in themselves, or in their own nature.’<sup>54</sup> Hence, for Edwards, conversion was more than the emotional outworkings of psychologized English and New England morphologies of conversion, it was also intellectually engaging – a dynamic, even mystical conjunction of the affections *and* the understanding that could be wrought instantaneously.

Indeed, as Edwards contemplated in his ‘Miscellanies’ what he experienced on that spring day and what caused his ‘sense of divine things’ to ‘gradually increase,’ he became assured of the instantaneousness of justification/regeneration.<sup>55</sup> The Holy Spirit did not seep into the soul, but overtook it by laying hold of the mind and becoming intellectually and inclinationally its ‘greatest apparent good’ (*M*284). The step-model of conversion seemed to Edwards too banal, too insipid, and entirely too anthropocentric; nor was it his experience of

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<sup>51</sup> *Diary*, *Works*16, 759. Kimnach adds, ‘Indeed, the extent of the “Diary” suggests that Edwards may have actually begun his diary in order to deal with the problem [of his atypical conversion]’ (*Works*10, 269). This is not to deny that JE had and maintained a doctrine of ‘preparation’; he certainly did. It was, however, subordinate to his thoughts concerning God’s programmatic pattern of effecting redemption (see Chapter V where I give this assertion further attention).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Goen’s analysis in ‘EI’, *Works*4, 25ff. For extensive discussions on the morphology of conversion see Pettit, *The Heart Prepared* and Stoevers, ‘*A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven*’. Both Timothy Edwards, JE’s maternal grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, were notable proponents of preparationism and its role in the step-model of conversion (see Timothy Edwards’ MS sermon on Cant. 4:16 [Beinecke Library] where he cites Stoddard’s *A Treatise Concerning Conversion* [Boston, 1719]; and Stoddard, *The Defects of Preachers Reproved* (New London, Conn., 1724). Cf. Kimnach, ‘Preface to the New York Period’, *Works*10, 271-72. Minkema offers the most complete analysis of Timothy Edwards’ pastorate and theory of conversion in ‘The Edwardses’.

<sup>53</sup> *PN*, *Works*16, 792.

<sup>54</sup> ‘True Grace Distinguished from the Experience of Devils’ (1752), *Banner-Works*, 2:48.

<sup>55</sup> *PN*, *Works*16, 793. See ‘*M*1’, *Works*13, 168-69. See also Chapter V.



things.<sup>56</sup> Still, he never abandoned the idea of preparation. As he once stated, ‘As to preparatory work before conversion, there is undoubtedly always, except in very extraordinary cases, such a thing.’<sup>57</sup> He did, however, make several important clarifications to his employment of the doctrine, and thereby evidenced early on that however would not accept his theological heritage uncritically.<sup>58</sup> But with regard to his own conversion, there was no doubt: it was a radical, definitive, and instantaneous renovation of the soul, wrought entirely by God Himself.

## 2.a. ‘*New Kind of Apprehensions*’ in a Unified Mind

Upon the event of his conversion, Edwards intuitively sensed that salvation was not so much about the self as it was about Christ’s excellencies and the manifestation of divine glory:

From about that time, I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by him. I had an inward sense of these things ... and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them.<sup>59</sup>

His problem did not chiefly rest with the *manner* of preparatory exercises, though he would question some of them, but with the *structure* and *content* of conversion itself.<sup>60</sup> Rather than describe the initial and subsequent occurrences of faith in dated experimental predestinarian terms of movements of both the intellect and will, Edwards, in rejecting the subordination of one faculty to another, reintroduced the familiar Puritan language of ‘inward spiritual sense’ or ‘sense of the heart’.<sup>61</sup> For Edwards, the ‘sense of the heart’ is a spiritual monocratic principle inseparable, yet distinguishable, from the soulish faculties of man. It

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<sup>56</sup> The morphology of conversion expounded in *FN* does not represent JE’s fixed teaching on conversion. Rather, as Goen explains, in that account JE was simply reporting what he had actually observed during the 1734/5 revival. But God, JE insisted then and again in his writings which emerged during the 1740-42 awakening, is ever at liberty to act otherwise than to bring conviction ‘then anxiety/despair and close with peace and joy of salvation’ (‘EI’, *Works4*, 25-32).

<sup>57</sup> ‘*M’r*, *Works13*, 173. ‘Extraordinary cases’, e.g. infant conversions.

<sup>58</sup> See Chapter V, §§4.a, 5, where I discuss the distinction he makes between autonomous preparation (the ability of a sinner to advance himself, in an unassisted manner, to the threshold of salvation – a possibility that JE rejects) and heteronomous preparation (the idea of a sinner prepared by God for salvation) and a third kind taught by JE, in which a sinner exposes himself to the ‘forum’ of salvation.

<sup>59</sup> *PN*, *Works16*, 793.

<sup>60</sup> *Diary* and *PN*, *Works16*, 759, 791. Goen’s commentary is helpful here: ‘Careful interpreters of Edwards observe that he was hardly attempting to “fix the work of the Spirit to an inflexible series of stages” [Cherry, *Reappraisal*, 65] or restrict conversion to a uniform pattern. He was always unwilling to reject an experience just because it failed to follow a certain presupposed order, for, as he put it in *Religious Affections*, “no order or method of operation and experiences is any certain sign of divinity” [*Worsk2*, 159]’ (*Works4*, 29).

<sup>61</sup> *FN* and the sermon ‘Christ, the Light of the World’ (*Works10*, 534-46) provide JE’s earliest attempts to explicate the spiritual sense given at conversion. See Richard Greenham, *The Workes of Richard Greenham* (London, 1612), 77-123; William Perkins, *A Clovd of Faithfull Witnesses* (Cambridge, 1607), v.7 ‘Noah’s faith’. The language and idea of ‘divine light’ and ‘sense of the heart’ were prevalent among Pietists and the Cambridge Platonists. JE would have encountered their usage in figures like Perkins, but also John Smith, whose *Select Discourses* in many places anticipate the terminology, phrasing, and concepts of JE’s *RA* (see Smith, ‘EI’, *Works2*, 66). *Select Discourses* was donated by Isaac Newton to the Dummer Collection and would have been available to JE at Yale.



consists of an appreciative intellect, a willing disposition, and affectional movements of the soul toward God in Jesus Christ. Conversion, then, marks the initial transition from a theoretical, abstract, and conditional understanding of Christian theocentrism to an authentic, progressive, and lively ‘sense’ that the propositional doctrines of soteriology are indeed an experientially agreeable, beautiful, and credible, reality.

According to Edwards, the spiritual sense gained in conversion conveys to the soul of man ‘divine light.’ This spiritual illumination makes ‘divine things’, such as the person and work of Christ, God’s sovereignty in salvation, and the whole administration of redemption, ‘appear excellent, beautiful, glorious, which [it] did not when the soul was of another spirit.’<sup>62</sup>

In Edwards, conversion affects all the distinguishable faculties of the soul through such coordination that there can be ‘no clear distinction between the two faculties of understanding and will, as acting distinctly and separately in this matter.’<sup>63</sup> Thus, from his conversion onward, he tends to speak of the concerted ‘man’ (mind).<sup>64</sup> This corresponds with his trinitarian formulations and dichotomous anthropological arrangement. He agrees with both Calvin and Locke in regarding as ‘altogether improper’ the tripartite distinction of the reason, will, and appetites in traditional psychology.<sup>65</sup> Hence, while using the fashionable language of distinct faculties of the mind, Edwards circumspectly denies the conception of their independence as distinct human powers. In this he again was not unlike Calvin or Locke, for all three oppose the assumption that faculties are distinct entities rather than different abilities or functions of a unitary mind. For Edwards, faculties are properties of the soul, and the soul is one.<sup>66</sup>

However, if a situation deemed it expedient, Edwards would explain that man is bipartite, not just in his biblically created state (body and soul), but also in the basic configuration of the soul. He would employ a traditional medieval distinction between the

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<sup>62</sup> ‘M’397, *Works*13, 462-63. In ‘M’866, JE treats the adjustment to the affections concerning ‘hard’ doctrines.

<sup>63</sup> *Works*2, 272. Elsewhere he states, ‘How the Scriptures are ignorant of the philosophic distinction of the understanding and the will’ (‘The Mind’14, *Works*6, 389).

<sup>64</sup> This would prove a decisive strategy in JE’s defense of the Great Awakening revivals as not hysterical movements of enthusiasm—as ‘Old Brick’ Charles Chauncy (1705-87) would caustically argue—but as a ‘genuine’ but ‘uncommon’ work of the Spirit of God. The defense rested on a thesis that rationalistic objections to the general revival were based on a false philosophy that artificially separated the ‘the affections of the soul’ from the will and, beyond that, the will from the understanding. As Goen explains, ‘This is a point that Old Lights [like Chauncy] never understood. They espoused at classical view of man according to which the “passions” are sub-rational appetites to be held in check by the reason, a perspective requiring that religion seek to enlighten the mind rather than raise the affections’ (‘EI’, *Works*4, 66; cf. Chauncy, *Seasonal Thoughts*, 327). JE on the other hand held that ‘true religion, in great part, consists in holy affections’ (*Works*2, 95). Whereby holy affections were the truly spiritual result of God’s regenerating work upon the heart. A change in disposition, not merely noetic reform, is what mattered. The ‘new spiritual sense’ evidenced the intellectual and affectional reorganization of the soul’s governing disposition – from natural to spiritual. This thesis developed into a full-orbed defense of his 1741 Yale sermon-address (*DM*) with *ST* (JE’s first major publication) and later treated in JE’s consummate analysis of ‘true religion’ in *RA*.

<sup>65</sup> See Calvin’s *Institutes*, I.5.9-14, III.2.7-8, and Locke’s *Essay*, bk.1.

<sup>66</sup> For a commendable assessment of JE’s holistic concept of the self, see Smith, ‘EI’, *Works*2, 11-15.



will and understanding, with no distinction between desire and will or the will and the affections.<sup>67</sup> Thus, when speaking of the particular exercises of the mind he is wont to adopt the dichotomy of soul characteristic of Calvinism—understanding and will; emotions are subsumed under the will. Such an arrangement of the faculties conveniently served his 1754 diatribe against the Arminians. The will could not be determined by the emotions, he argued, because they were different sides of the same coin. The determination of the will must be considered in light of its integrated relation to the understanding.<sup>68</sup>

Again, the distinctions between the faculties are not ultimate for Edwards; they are valuable conventions of pedagogy. For example, although he conceives of the powers or faculties of man as an ‘interpenetrating’ unity (to use Conrad Cherry’s terminology), yet he regularly retains a key distinction between understanding and will when underscoring the difference between a person’s ‘merely notional understanding’ or ‘speculative knowledge’ and that person being ‘in some way inclined’ or ‘sensible’ either by attraction (agreeableness) or aversion (disagreeableness) to an object, option, or proposition. However, the distinction is not absolute. The difference between notional-understanding/speculative-knowledge and affectional-knowledge is not really between the faculties: the affections are inescapably active in abstract ratiocination, e.g. one’s mind could find the abstraction  $4^3=64$  ‘agreeable’; likewise, the rational mind partakes in an evaluative judgment of that to which the will passionately inclines. Instead, the difference respects the type of knowledge one possesses of a given object, option, or proposition – whether accurate or not, and whether the affections included in that knowledge correspond to the reality conceived; that is, whether they correspond to *God’s conception* of (spiritual) reality. This distinction is particularly important when discussing the noetic mind and conversion.

In conversion, the act of faith does not consist of distinctly isolated movements of intellect and will, consent, and volitional motion (as it did for Aquinas); for, as Cherry states, Edwards understood them as a pervaded whole.<sup>69</sup> The idea of ‘trusting’ in the converting act of faith, then, includes in its very nature a judgment regarding the *reality* of its object, a forensic notion of ‘consent’ to that object as ‘good, eligible or desirable,’ dependence, hope, and a posture of servitude on the basis of the object.<sup>70</sup> What is more, his Calvinian notion of

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<sup>67</sup> *Works2*, 97. JE adds that affections ‘are no other than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul’ (96). Affections, then, are the intensifications of dispositions of ‘agreeableness’ or ‘disagreeableness’ in choosing. JE’s usage of ‘affections’ can be synonymous with ‘emotions’ if only understood to mean a felt or ‘sensed’ response to an ‘object, event, or situation which is called forth by an *understanding* of the nature of the object’ (Smith, *Jonathan Edwards*, 33).

<sup>68</sup> See *FW*, *Works1*. Yet, as Smith and others have noted, this distinction did not tend to subordinate the understanding to feelings, as Miller and Aldridge contend (Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, 184; Aldridge, *Jonathan Edwards*, 22).

<sup>69</sup> Cherry, *Reappraisal*, 17.

<sup>70</sup> ‘Observations Concerning Faith’, *Worcester-Works*, 2:621; ‘M’ 568, *Works18*, 105.



trust also includes an affectional dimension that corresponds to the ‘beauty’ or ‘excellence’ of the object. The object, of course, is Jesus Christ.

In no way, therefore, does Edwards limit his understanding of faith to merely a special kind of relation characterized by trust, commitment, obedience, etc. To do so would have categorized his notion of faith as merely existential, though, to be sure, Edwards was indeed placing an emphasis on faith as an existential response to reality apprehended directly.<sup>71</sup> But something within and of faith must be understood; it must have a cognitive, intellectual dimension – the cognition of its object’s *beautiful reality*. Affectional faith is, therefore, not abjectly mystical; rather, it possesses aesthetic philosophical objectivity. For this reason, the explanatory distinctions between ‘faculties and powers’ become obstructive and must be abandoned.<sup>72</sup>

The whole conversion process can also be explained in trinitarian theological terms: God the Father’s perfect idea of His Self (the Son crucified and resurrected) must be known and loved (corresponding to the Spirit) *ad extra* as He is *ad intra*; that is, in a fashion worthy and identifiable with Himself. In faith, then, the powers of intellect and will, of knowing and loving that beautiful reality—the Father through the Son in the Spirit—become one just as God is One: the various movements of the unified consciousness in the act of faith are not distinct acts but are different modes of the same act.<sup>73</sup> When a person possesses faith in God they know Him as beautiful in Jesus Christ and love that beauty in the Spirit. Thus, for Edwards, conversion is the moment when the mind perceives the gospel’s object as irresistibly beautiful and lays hold of that object by responding in faith.

Significantly, then, ‘the spiritual sense’ is an effect in and of a singular *mind*, not this or that faculty. Likewise, the result of conversion occurs not in terms of a domino effect, but a radical, pervasive, and instantaneous alteration of the collective soul (‘M’ 397).

## **2.b. *The Spiritual Sense as ‘New Simple Idea’***

From the start Edwards struggles in his efforts to convey the idea of ‘spiritual sensibilities’. He admits on more than one occasion that it is not only a challenging idea conceptually, but difficult to encapsulate in language. His attempts to better explicate the nature of conversion and its end product, spiritual sensibilities, continued for decades. In this respect, his later works defending revival may be seen as a collective explanation of his views on these issues.

In one early attempt, he resorts to ideas in Locke’s *Essay*, particularly Locke’s process of collating knowledge into simple and complex ideas. Locke’s theory of ideas begin with an

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<sup>71</sup> Smith, ‘EI’, *Works2*, 29. This would have been in keeping with his pietistic and evangelical beliefs concerning the necessity of regeneration – an emphasis found everywhere in his revival writings, esp. his sermons. Here, however, JE places the emphasis not on the conversion experience itself, but on the object of conversion.

<sup>72</sup> Cherry, *Reappraisal*, 16-18.

<sup>73</sup> As discussed in Cherry, *Reappraisal*, 12-24.



attack on the theory of innate ideas, which argues instead that every person's knowledge originates from and depends upon his conscious experience, and that it reaches no further than can be discovered from the ideas presented in experience. Such thinking struck a cord with Edwards. In the end, however, Edwards retained the empiricist's terminology of ideas, but altered Locke's usage of new simple ideas and largely discarded the theory of complex ideas. Locke's view that experience produces ideas, which are the immediate objects of thought, led him to adopt a causal or representative view of human knowledge. In perception, said Locke, persons are not directly or immediately aware of physical objects. Instead, they are directly aware of the ideas which objects 'cause' and that 'represent' the objects in their understanding or consciousness. Further, once a person receives some 'new simple idea', it becomes almost altogether incommunicable. One certainly could not repeat (better, reproduce) it through human linguistic discourse. Essentially, the experience and the content of a 'new simple idea' are individualized. The Lockean doctrine of knowledge by means of *ideas* that are causally connected with but only representations of objects distinct from the mind intrigued Edwards with respect to explaining the 'new spiritual sense'.

Outside of 'M' 123, the 'new simple idea' is not so concisely defined in Edwards. Neither has there been any degree of unanimity between scholars on his precise meaning and usage of the term. Nonetheless there is conformity that the notion of the 'new simple idea' corresponds with his writings on the 'sense of the heart'. Perry Miller initiated the uniform recognition of the 'new simple idea' with Edwards' teaching on the 'new' or 'spiritual sense', or 'sense of the heart,' and its importance in his thought, calling it 'the heart of Edwards' metaphysics.'<sup>74</sup>

There is a sense, however, in which Edwards' usage of the Lockean 'new simple idea' is epistemologically misleading. For Locke, it is a straightforward increase of knowledge not previously added, but for Edwards it means a new input and interpretation of that knowledge *and*, in its larger context, a *re*interpretation of associated prior knowledge. We may use Locke's example of a pineapple to illustrate: both Locke and Edwards taste it and gain some 'new' idea; but Edwards gets something *more* out of it, an inimitable input that intuitively places 'pineapple' into the larger context of mental reality. Whether he has previous knowledge of 'pineapple' or engages it for the first time, its taste possesses meaning for him that extends beyond the simple idea of 'the taste of pineapple'. Likewise, the input he gains from tasting pineapple is interpreted so as to include spiritual, mental, and moral dimensions of reality. The input of its taste, though empirically the same as Locke's, meets a different interpretation. The 'new spiritual sense', therefore, also functions like a template, an interpretive framework by which the mind processes reality. So while agents *A* and *B* (*B* possessing the spiritual sense) have equal access to phenomenon *x*, *A* perceives *x* as *x* and

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<sup>74</sup> Miller, 'Jonathan Edwards on the Sense of the Heart', 124.



interprets it as  $x$ , yet  $B$  perceives  $x$  as  $\{x\}$  and interprets it as such. Edwards' analogy of the 'sweetness of honey' attempts to demonstrate both the newness of input and interpretation:

[I]n gracious exercises and affections which are wrought in the minds of the saints, through the saving influences of the Spirit of God, there is a new inward perception or sensation of their minds ... and there is, *as it were*, a new spiritual sense that the mind has, or principle of new kind of perception or spiritual sensation, which is in its whole nature different from any former kind of sensation of the mind, as tasting is diverse from any of the others senses; and something is perceived by a true saint, in the exercises of this new sense of mind, in spiritual and divine things, as entirely diverse from anything that is perceived in them, by natural men, as the sweet taste of honey is diverse from the ideas men get of honey by only looking on it, and feeling it.<sup>75</sup>

While this illustration is helpful in explaining that the 'new spiritual sense' facilitates new input and interpretation, yet it stands clear that the 'new simple idea' itself is only an *analogy* of sorts, for Edwards: hence the proviso 'as it were' and the concept's ultimate failure to represent sufficiently the idea.

Understanding Edwards' 'new simple idea' not as a definitive expression or designation of the 'new spiritual sense' but analogous to the content and nature of the 'sense of the heart' may not only account for the ambiguity of the concept but also the failure of interpreters to agree on his meaning and usage.<sup>76</sup>

Perry Miller, among others, fails to appreciate the 'sense of the heart' as a sort of analogy and, by closely associating Edwards' thought with Locke's 'way of ideas' (in which all mental conceptions originate in sense experience), interprets the Edwardsean experience of divine grace—whether initially or subsequent to conversion—as a kind of sensation. He explains that, although for Edwards, 'Conversion is a perception, a kind of apprehension derived exactly as Locke said mankind gets all simple ideas, out of natural sensory experience', yet in the new sense, 'there is nothing transcendental; it is rather a sensuous appreciation of the total situation.' The 'sense of the heart', or conviction of salvation, or spiritual things is merely a succeeding epistemological stage that 'depends on and presumes the first.' According to Miller, 'the supernatural effect thus becomes, in Edwards' vision of the cosmos, integrated "naturally and immediately" in nature.'<sup>77</sup>

Miller denies that there is something really *new* about the 'input'; indeed, that there is a different input whatsoever. Instead, there is only a contrived passional interpretation (affected by Edwards' 'rhetoric of sensation') *about* conventional input.<sup>78</sup> Because Miller consciously

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<sup>75</sup> *Works*2, 205-06. Italics added.

<sup>76</sup> The 'new simple idea' as a kind of analogy is further evidenced by JE's belief that all men have some idea of God, albeit in a vague, perverted and suppressed way. The ideas that come with spiritual regeneration cannot be, in the most absolute sense, unconditionally and perfectly 'new'.

<sup>77</sup> Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, 139; 'Sense of the Heart', 127-28.

<sup>78</sup> Similarly, John Hick states that there is no new or substantially different input for the Christian, just a different interpretation about shared input ('The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity' in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, ed. Hick, 23ff). On the 'rhetoric of sensation': Miller presents the idea that due to Locke's nominalist separation of words from things themselves, JE developed a 'rhetoric of



analyzes Edwards in the shadow of Locke, he explains Edwards' 'new simple idea' merely as a sensationalized form of Locke's idea and therefore ignores the fact that Edwards found their basic conceptions analogous not homogeneous. It is no surprise then that Miller's perspective neglects Edwards' insistence on *God's* immediate presence to the mind for conversion.

Through an encounter with God the individual acquires *new* supernatural knowledge that was previously unattainable through the senses or any other means. Here we have the chief reason why Edwards' version of the 'new simple idea' as 'new spiritual sense' cannot be equated with Locke's understanding of 'new simple idea' within his theory of ideas. For Locke, the new simple idea comes through a physical sense experience – some *outward thing* causes the conscious mind to come into possession of a new idea. For Jonathan Edwards, however, one need not engage empirically some outward thing in order to come into possession of the new spiritual sense—God is the object and may grant 'views' (perception) of Himself or especially the excellency of Christ, internally. Thus, Edwards' theory is ultimately incompatible with the Lockean theory of ideas in that the outward senses are by no means the only source of ideas for Edwards, but merely the occasions which God—who is the only true causal agent in Edwards' idealistic occasionalism—has been pleased to link certain ideal relations, but in a lawlike (Newtonian) way to be sure.

Neither reason nor empirical sense experience can establish spiritual sensibilities: they are categorically different.<sup>79</sup> This is because spiritual illumination has a *supernatural* epistemic quality – it is revelatory. McClymond explains that the revelatory nature of spiritual illumination 'does not merely "enlarge" natural reason but transcends it,' conferring some new input which the human mind could never attain 'by its own resources.'<sup>80</sup> Man is unable to independently conceive or create a new spiritual sense. Such powers are 'supernatural and reserved for God' alone.<sup>81</sup> So, when Edwards develops his 'sense of the heart' and identifies it with Locke's simple idea, he claims by analogy that only God could impart such a 'sense'.

The new sense is epistemic in nature – it conveys information about God. The kind of information it conveys is not, strictly speaking, mystical nor charismatic, but aesthetic, cognitive, and informative. One should not, however, restrict its input to only incorporeal subject matter; for when empirical phenomena are *spiritually perceived* they undergo reinterpretation by a distinctly religious hermeneutic to be sensibly perceived *as* illuminant.

### ***2.c. The Spiritual Sense as Epistemic Principle***

Of the wide scope of material written on Edwards' 'new spiritual sense', Michael J. McClymond's recent exposition emerges as the most useful analysis of its epistemological

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sensation' that linked words of judgment and feeling to ideas with the intent of establishing an inseparability of idea and emotion ('The Rhetoric of Sensation' in *Errand into the Wilderness*, 167-83).

<sup>79</sup> *Works*2, 206.

<sup>80</sup> McClymond, *Encounters*, 16.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*



dimension. He clarifies our understanding of the spiritual sense by delineating its interrelated elements: content, mode, and sensibility.

First, the *content* of perception is divine or spiritual ‘excellency’ (also designated ‘holiness,’ ‘beauty,’ or ‘amiability’). Spiritual perception of God must be ‘full’, according to McClymond, and include God’s majesty and mercy, glory and excellence, wrath and love, justice and forgiveness.<sup>82</sup> Subjectively, spiritual perception confers an immediate certainty, yet still possesses objectivity – the intellectual certitude of the believer’s spiritual perception transcends any certitude contrived by human reasoning about God. As Edwards writes: ‘The gospel of the blessed God don’t go abroad begging for its evidence ... it has its highest and most proper evidence in itself.’ Thus, ‘The first objective ground of gracious affections,’ he claims, ‘is the transcendently excellent and amiable nature of divine things, *as they are in themselves*; and not any conceived relation they bear to self, or self-interest.’<sup>83</sup> Despite his pervasive interest in the human affections, Edwards nonetheless insists that the spiritual sense is an appropriate human response to *God as God is in Himself*.<sup>84</sup> Edwards neither abandons nor neglects human religious sensitivity or divine objectivity when unfolding his theory of spiritual sense, but rather, as McClymond writes, ‘The subjective and objective aspects of religious experience come together in the notion of spiritual perception.’<sup>85</sup>

Secondly, the *mode* of perception is the ‘divine and supernatural light,’ operating in and alongside the unified human consciousness. One of McClymond’s insights states that the subjective correlate to the encounter or revelatory manifestation is *perception*. Since an encounter with God is a spiritual event, then the corresponding perception must be spiritual. Here Edwards’ spiritual epistemology discloses its relation to his early idealism: if God’s glory is to ‘exist in emanation’, then it must be perceived within the ‘realm’ of its manifestation in order for it to be ‘real’ in *that* realm. In Edwards, ‘There is no glory without perception, and the perception God intended is surely as much *in* the person that is the subject of the work, as any.’<sup>86</sup> In a converting encounter with God the mind becomes spiritually perceptive, while at the same time God manifests His glory through that perception. (More on this later.)

And lastly, the *sensibility* of perception is the ‘spiritual sense’ or ‘new sense,’ the essence of which consists of ‘delight’, ‘agreeableness’, or, especially, ‘consent in God’.<sup>87</sup>

These three aspects of the new sense are important to Edwards to distinguish the regenerate mind from the unregenerate. The difference between the ‘notional’ appreciation of the unregenerate and the spiritual appreciation of the regenerate lies in the sensible perception

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 18. *PN, Works*16, 792-95.

<sup>83</sup> *Works*2, 240, 307. Italics added.

<sup>84</sup> McClymond, *Encounters*, 16.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. Cf. Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart*, 26-30.

<sup>86</sup> ‘M’354, *Works*13, 428.

<sup>87</sup> McClymond, *Encounters*, 17-22.



of the divine ‘excellency’ and ‘reality’ of propositions specially revealed in Scripture. Again, it is the difference between common religious understanding and true affectional religion.<sup>88</sup>

Prior to a converting encounter the unregenerate may rationally know such propositions, but their affections will not correspond (‘consent’) to the beauty or reality of them.<sup>89</sup> The unregenerate finds these objective spiritual truths ‘disagreeable’ and fictitious. On the other hand, spiritual perception, when either initiated in the divine encounter or subsequently exercised, intuitively apprehends *with consent* (love) the aesthetic dynamic and reality, both experientially and propositionally. Which is to say, the direct object of spiritual perception is spiritual beauty; the which, when consentingly apprehended, is perceived to be *spiritual*. Meanwhile, the indirect objects in this equation are spiritual facts or truths simultaneously apprehended as the counterpart of spiritual beauty.<sup>90</sup>

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The acquisition of spiritual perception through regeneration carries with it ‘a sort of certainty of faith’ that is ‘different from reason’ and yet ‘such a belief may be altogether agreeable to reason’ and the ‘exactest rules’ of philosophy, according to Edwards.<sup>91</sup>

Spiritual perception or awareness is *experiential* in the way it contrasts merely discursive thinking about God. The spiritual sense that Edwards labors to describe, writes Schafer, ‘sees and feels in its object, in the experience itself, such marks of the divine as to produce an intuitive certainty that the object of faith and devotion is indeed the Deity.’<sup>92</sup> As McClymond explains, in the revelatory encounter with God the unified consciousness intuitively takes it that God has been *presented*, or *given* to its unified consciousness. Edwards goes beyond simply transposing the meaning and terminology of Locke’s ‘way of ideas’ for the purpose of epistemologically defending and justifying his own religious experience.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, the ‘new spiritual sense’ as ‘new simple idea’ is the mental experience of a new kind of knowledge, a distinctly spiritual knowledge of ‘spiritual beauty’ or ‘excellency’ or, (correspondingly) God as God is in Himself. In short, the acquisition of the spiritual sense functions for Edwards as the epistemological gateway to an authentic (spiritual) and perspectival theocentrism: hence Edwards’ articulation of faith as an ‘existential’ response to reality – as it really is, viz. saturated with God’s excellency and spiritual reality.

Joshua Moody comments that it is easy to see why Edwards was so confident in his Great Awakening sermons and treatises, that the ‘new sense’ could be used as a sign of an operation

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<sup>88</sup> *Works2*, 95.

<sup>89</sup> This aesthetic/relational correlation is the determining factor in JE’s definition of truth (‘The Mind’ Nos. 6, 10, *Works6*, 340, 341-42).

<sup>90</sup> Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart*, 30. ‘M’123, *Works13*, 286-87.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Schafer, ‘EI’, *Works13*, 44.

<sup>93</sup> In fact, JE distances himself from Locke by (i) changing Locke’s original usage of ‘complex idea’ (see especially ‘M’aa, *Works13*, 177) and (ii) conditioning the ‘new simple idea’ according to the principles of his own independently developed idealism. Compare Locke, *Essay*, bk. II, 12.



of God's Spirit and a reliable mark of 'true religion'.<sup>94</sup> Apologetically, it was to offer a subtle, yet powerful epistemological line of reasoning for the validity of Christian revelation and the converting and reviving work of the Spirit, which, in turn, left 'Old Light' opponents like Charles Chauncy confused, but proponents of supernatural regeneration and spiritual revivals appreciative for centuries to follow.<sup>95</sup> To be sure, in Edwards' life-long investigation into the question, 'What is true religion', the 'positive signs' and 'distinguishing marks' indicative of his concern for experimental religion and direct experience with divine excellencies would always ground themselves upon his religious epistemology of the new spiritual sense.

#### 2.d. *The Spiritual Sense: An Ontological Principle*

Ultimately, however, the new spiritual sense is the consequence of a spiritual union, a real *ontological* union with Christ through the Third Person of the Trinity.<sup>96</sup> Thus, it is the Holy Spirit who effectively communicates the dynamic idea of spiritual reality to the consciousness of the believer. Edwards does not explain this idea as the addition of any new faculty or so-called 'sixth sense', but in terms of a 'new disposition'.<sup>97</sup> This assertion rests, however, upon the metaphysical principles of his independently developed idealism. In order to show how God may dwell in the mind of man as a new ontic disposition, we must give a brief account of the operating principles of Edwards' idealism.

At first, Edwards' idealism supplements his account of atoms and, consequently, has the objective of proposing an alternative immaterialistic metaphysic to materialism and the dichotomy of objects and qualities. He claims matter is a merely derivative phenomenon of consciousness through the proposal: all that exists 'exists only mentally'.<sup>98</sup> What we perceive are ideas within the mind, not material objects: the world is not independent of the mind.

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<sup>94</sup> Moody, 'Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment', c. 2. JE's *Diary* and *PN* also served as outlets to explain and defend his view of conversion and sanctification. The treatises *RA*, *DW* and *ST* especially explain the significance of affectional religion for God's glorification.

<sup>95</sup> See Goen, 'EI', *Works4*, 1-95, esp. 65-66 and *RA*, *Works2*, 7f.

<sup>96</sup> 'M'bb and ff, *Works13*, 178, 183.

<sup>97</sup> *Works2*, 206. Smith insightfully remarks that the emphasis on nature emphasizes the *transition* that takes place in conversion—from nature to grace (op. cit., 'EI', 20). This is another reason why regeneration/conversion could also be instantaneous. David Lyttle, James Hoopes, and Paul Helm entertain the idea that JE's spiritual sense may be a 'sixth sense'. See Lyttle, 'The Sixth Sense of Jonathan Edwards', 50-51; Hoopes, 'Jonathan Edwards's Religious Psychology', 849-65; and Helm, 'John Locke and Jonathan Edwards', 51-61.

<sup>98</sup> 'The Mind' 27, *Works6*, 350. Commentators have taken JE's statement that all exists only mentally or 'only in the mind' a number of different ways. Anderson, for instance, asserts that JE's leading metaphysical thesis states that 'nothing can be without being known' (ibid., 76). He concludes that JE is an idealistic phenomenologist with respect to the phenomena presented to the senses: an idea is an empirical object or sensation when determined to be a fixed mode in our mind after a series established by God. De Prosopo's alternative explanation holds that idealism need not necessarily imply that the universe exists only subjectively in the mind: '[JE] means not that nature is phenomenologically a projection of the mind, but that nature can be experienced by men only through the mind's ideal impression of nature's objective being' (*Theism in the Discourse of Jonathan Edwards*, 150). However, I am persuaded that Anderson and McClymond are correct: JE's idealism is a product of his ontological conception of perception and knowing. The idea of the world is an idea communicated by God.



Soon after this proposal and while contemplating the *purpose* of God's immanent presence in reality, Edwards again takes to writing about idealistic principles. In the first of these 'Miscellanies' (gg), he reasons that the world 'would be of no use if there was no intelligent being but God, for God could neither receive good himself nor communicate good.' 'Wherefore,' he continues, 'it necessarily follows that intelligent beings are the end of creation, that their end must be to behold and admire the doings of God, and magnify him for them, and to contemplate his glories in them.' Which is to say, intelligent creatures are useless unless their end is 'to behold [later, 'perceive'] and admire ... God.'<sup>99</sup>

These ideas are refined through '*M'kk* and *ll* and culminate in the idealism of *pp*, where he writes that there can be no being, neither angels, nor men, nor the world, without a consciousness of it. His argument in '*M'pp* supposes a time when God's consciousness as well as that of finite beings was intermitted, and concludes: 'I say, the universe for that time would cease to be, of itself; and not only, as we speak, because the Almighty could not attend to uphold the world, but because God knew nothing of it.'<sup>100</sup> Following a further illustration from a notebook entitled 'Of Being', in which he contemplates the removal of secondary qualities from matter, Edwards announces: 'It follows from hence, that those beings which have knowledge and consciousness are the only proper and real substantial beings, inasmuch as the being of other things is only these. From hence we may see the gross mistake of those who think material things the most substantial beings, and spirits more like a shadow; whereas spirits only are properly substance.'<sup>101</sup> (An obvious reference to Hobbes and his naturalist devotees.)<sup>102</sup>

This conclusion reiterates the idealism from his essay 'Of Being', in which he states, 'Nothing has any existence anywhere else but in consciousness ... either in created or uncreated consciousness.'<sup>103</sup> Such statements are not to be taken hypothetically, but as explanations of agents of consciousness and their existence and objects of consciousness and how they exist, as well as how existence itself is qualified on his 'scale of existences'. In religion, however, these speculative exercises propose an eminently mental/spiritual universe in which God is not only preeminently being but also the causal progenitor of the perception of ideas and their telos: ideas are not the product of empirical sensations, they are created and communicated by something spiritual – God.

We may conclude that Edwards holds at this stage at least three operating principles of idealism: (1) The mind(s) is the ultimate metaphysical principle of reality; (2) only that which

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<sup>99</sup> *Works13*, 185.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>101</sup> 'Of Being', *Works6*, 204, 203-06. Here I am following Schafer's analysis in, 'EI', *Works13*, 47-48.

<sup>102</sup> Like 'Of Atoms', 'Of Being' argues against materialism with an immaterialism that does not begin with a denial of matter like Berkeley, but with a denial of material *substance*. But more on this later.

<sup>103</sup> *Works6*, 204, 206.



is perceptible to *IPMs* has status as ‘real’ in time and space; and (3) that reality ultimately consists in the communication, shared conception and perception, of ideas by God to *IPMs*.

An important conclusion Edwards draws from the aforementioned principles, and one of immediate bearing on our present discussion, concerns the Divine Being’s conscious idea of Himself constituting His essence. God’s perfect consciousness of His own Being renders Him totally *ens a se*, and this places Him, as it were, at the head of the ‘great chain of being’.<sup>104</sup>

The connection between the epistemic content of the ‘new spiritual sense’ and ontological union with Christ becomes apparent in Edwards’ statement: ‘So if all God’s ideas are only the one idea of himself, as has been shown, then [God’s idea of himself] must be his essence itself’, which, when understood in light of the spiritual sense, means that the spiritual perception of God or (better) the *idea of spiritual reality* communicated to the believer by the Spirit, is in fact the idea of God Himself. However, the Spirit who communicates the idea of God is not a complex idea to the perceiver, but a ‘new simple idea’ – a ‘new disposition’:<sup>105</sup>

The Spirit of God is given to the true saints to dwell in them ... to influence their hearts, as a principle of new nature, a holy disposition, or as a divine supernatural spring of life and action.... [H]e is represented as being there so united to the faculties of the soul, that he becomes there a principle or spring of new nature and life ... there he exerts and communicates himself, in this his sweet and divine nature, making the soul a partaker of God’s beauty.... From hence it follows ... there is a new inward perception or sensation of their minds.<sup>106</sup>

Edwards, then, grounds his epistemology of spiritual perception and knowledge upon an ontological arrangement – union with Christ or the infused disposition of holiness, which is nothing other than the Holy Spirit. Hence, the epistemic content of the spiritual sense results from a *new ontic state of mind*. Since ‘God is excellent,’ then the subject’s ‘perception of excellence’ through the Holy Spirit consists of nothing other than the apprehension of God, or

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<sup>104</sup> ‘God’s intuition on himself, without doubt, is immediate ... his idea [of himself] is his essence’ (*M*’94, *Works*13, 258). Human beings who are fashioned after God’s own existence as agents of consciousness, have a consciousness of their own self, that is, they are conscious of their own being, and therefore have as it were a self-sustaining mental existence independent from other *created* entities. They are, of course, ‘comprehended’ by the Divine Being and thus depend on God to conceive of them as distinct existences. Human beings, then, as nearly independent self-actuating existences (in that they mentally reflect upon their own being), are *like* God, but yet depend on God’s conception of them as distinct existences, which, while comprehended by God, are neither divine, nor autonomous existences. Further down the scale are non-sentient entities such as animals, which require *IPMs* to receive the communication of the idea of their existence from God. Their existence is a less rarefied mental existence (and therefore less ‘real’) due to their highly regulated and determined existence by laws. The existence of non-mental entities (objects of consciousness) is completely determined by laws, which places them at the bottom of the chain. See Chapter II for an account of God’s self-consciousness and, derivatively, human self-consciousness in Chapter III. JE is peculiar in that he only understands self-aware/conscious beings to be sentient beings. All else, including animals, are designated non-sentient.

<sup>105</sup> *Treatise*, 74-75. Cf. Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 143. When JE discusses ‘Being in general’ (God) he usually uses the term ‘habit’ as the equivalent of ‘disposition’, but in soteriological matters he prefers the term ‘disposition’. In other contexts he uses the following: ‘tendency’, ‘propensity’, and ‘principle’ (*Works*2, 206-07; 283-84; *Works*6, 124f). Cf. McDermott, ‘A Possibility of Reconciliation’ in *Edwards in Our Time*, 183-84. To simplify matters, I employ the term ‘disposition’ in most places.

<sup>106</sup> *Works*2, 200-01, 205.



God's communication of the idea of His 'excellent perfections' (the Son and Spirit – God as He is in Himself) *in* the unified consciousness of the believer.<sup>107</sup>

Knowledge for Edwards is the perception of the aesthetic 'union or disunion of ideas, or the perceiving whether two or more ideas belong to one another.' That is, the soul, as it were, naturally associates ideas that are similar because of mental dispositions that intuitively recognize the connections between things *or* because of the likeness of mind or disposition.<sup>108</sup> In the case of spiritual perception it is both. The idea of the 'excellence' and reality of divine things—whether in propositional truths, experiential perceptions, or divine encounter—is an idea which, by virtue of its intrinsic excellency, 'agrees' with the disposition of the regenerate *because* their disposition or 'principle of holiness' consists of divine excellency itself, the Holy Spirit.<sup>109</sup> In other words, since Edwards' metaphysics constitutes the entire universe in consciousness (which, of course, leaves no possibility of unconscious mental phenomena), his phenomenology of religious consciousness means that the conceptual, passionate, and 'agreeable' perception of the idea of 'God' is in fact God. 'Hence we learn,' Edwards explains, 'that ... what is done in conversion is nothing but conferring the Spirit of God, which dwells in the soul and becomes there a principle of life and action' to give 'the sensible knowledge of the things of religion, with respect to their spiritual good or evil: which indeed does all originally consist in a sense of the spiritual excellency, beauty, or sweetness of divine things'.<sup>110</sup> Since, in Edwards, only Christ possesses full and acceptable knowledge of God, and the Spirit right love of God, then any one who affectionally cognizes the beauty of God must participate in His essential love and knowledge of Himself, i.e. have ontological union with God in Christ through the Spirit.

Where Edwards appears ambiguous in his explanation of the 'new spiritual sense' as analogous to 'new simple ideas', he leaves no room for doubt in the sphere of ontology: The 'new sense' is an ontic disposition, a 'vital principle' ingenerated upon conversion, whereby the regenerate mind affectionally cognates God's beauty, presence, and purpose in the world.

I submit, therefore, that the degree to which previous interpretations of Edwards' 'sense of the heart' have neglected the ontological relation of the subject to the object (based on his 'correspondence of ideas' concept) as an ultimate extension of his idea of God, exhibits the degree to which his employment of empirical and psychological terminology with relation to the 'spiritual sense' have been misconstrued and misrepresented. Clearly for Edwards that which is infused into the believer upon justification/regeneration is neither a new faculty for the rational apprehension of Christian doctrines, nor a 'sixth sense', nor even an 'ideal apprehension' in terms of natural, sense experience conjured up through what Miller calls a

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<sup>107</sup> 'M'117, *Works*13, 284.

<sup>108</sup> 'The Mind' 71, *Works*6, 329. See also 'The Mind' Nos. 7 and 10 (*Works*6, 340, 341-42) on truth.

<sup>109</sup> 'Essay on the Trinity', *Treatise*, 110-22, esp. 111. 'M'471, *Works*13, 514.

<sup>110</sup> 'M'397, *Works*13, 462; 'M'782, *Works*18, 464.



‘rhetoric of sensation’. Instead, it is a ‘new disposition’, the Holy Spirit Himself, who communicates the idea of divine beauty and reality *in* the consciousness of the believer.<sup>111</sup>

### 2.d.i. *A New Disposition*

By ‘disposition’ or ‘habit’ Edwards means an active and ontologically real tendency, not merely a custom or regularity. However, to speak in such away about the Holy Spirit may seem to depersonalize the Spirit, making this member of the Trinity to sound more like a mechanistic *power* instead of a *person*. But Edwards by no means intends to reduce the Holy Spirit to some nebulous force or impersonal power. Rather, by saying the Spirit dwells as an active disposition in the believer, he means to say that this Person of the Trinity only acts according to His immutable nature – in holiness and with divine arbitrariness.<sup>112</sup> And since what the Spirit communicates in the unified consciousness of the believer are ‘the excellencies of Christ’, ‘holiness’, and ‘all things divine,’ He both personally and intensely communicates His own divine nature. However, the Spirit does not communicate these things with nomic regularity indicative of Newtonian physics, but only in accord with His divine arbitrariness (*M* 1263). For Edwards, there is nothing higher than God’s will, for it is not something different from God’s mental nature. Consequently, there is a sense in which strong or complete arbitrariness (as opposed to weak or self-limited or restrictive arbitrariness) may be considered part of the divine nature. Which is to say, though the Spirit may dwell ‘as a principle of life and a principle of action’, yet He does it ‘*in His own proper nature*’, that is, with some degree of arbitrariness indicative of the divine nature.<sup>113</sup> I say ‘some degree’ because the Spirit confederates with the Father and the Son to accomplish specific ‘ends’ in redemption, sanctification, and even history. In this respect, the Spirit retains, as it were, innertrinitarian covenantal obligations (the weak or self-restrictive arbitrariness). Thus, the occasional exercises of the believer’s ‘new principle of nature’ are not the result of some created principle of grace, but only the Spirit acting according to His nature ‘as’ or ‘*after the manner of*’ a principle of nature, that is, with some degree of weak arbitrariness:

... that holy, divine principle ... is GOD, and in which the Godhead is eternally breathed forth; and subsists in the third person of the blessed Trinity. So that true saving grace is no other than that very love of God – that is, God, in one of the persons of the Trinity, uniting Himself to the

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<sup>111</sup> *M* 1, *Works* 13, 168-69. Cf. *M* bb, 27 and 77. See also Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 121, 126.

<sup>112</sup> ‘Arbitrary’, for JE, does not have the connotation of capricious, but rather is, in the words of McClymond, ‘a technical term ... which he uses ... in its Latin etymological meaning of “a matter of the [arbiter’s] will”’ (*Encounters*, 20). JE writes: ‘’Tis the glory of God that He is an arbitrary being ... [and] acts as being limited and directed in nothing but His own wisdom’ (*M* 1263, *PJE*, 186). Thus, for JE, divine arbitrariness consists of God being absolutely self-willed *according to His inscrutable wisdom*, the seat of the moral necessity of God’s acts of the will (see *FW*, *Works* 1, Part IV, §8). Cf. Ramsey, ‘EI’, *Works* 1, 108-13 for more extensive treatment of JE’s use of arbitrary.

<sup>113</sup> *Works* 14, 384. Italics mine. See Chapter V, §1.b. for further discussion with respect to Morimoto.



soul of a creature, *as a vital principle, dwelling there and exerting Himself by the faculties of the soul of man, in His own proper nature, after the manner of a principle of nature.*<sup>114</sup>

When this ‘vital principle’ or holy disposition is infused into and ‘united to the soul of a creature,’ it brings entirely new and dynamic relations, thought patterns, and moral government of the soul: hence the ‘new spiritual sense’, the necessity of sanctification, and the radically theocentric vision and interpretation of reality. The Holy Spirit, as that new, active, and availing disposition, gives the believer constitutive ontological integrity, assurance that persevering in holiness and righteousness will be effected, and, significantly, an epistemic perspective on ‘reality’ heretofore unobtainable in an unregenerate condition. In short, the spiritual sense is a holy disposition—the Holy Spirit—which, when infused into the believer’s consciousness at the moment of regeneration, both communicates and facilitates the perception/reception of spiritual ideas of divine excellency and reality. However, this does not extinguish the regenerate *IPB*’s consciousness. Instead, it paradigmatically expands it, which accounts not only for new input and interpretation but also the reinterpretation of prior input. But because the Holy Spirit does continue to exercise Himself with a stronger arbitrariness, perfect sanctification and full theosis never avail in this life for the regenerate believer. Instead, they always remain *semper iustus ac peccator*.

Without the Holy Spirit unregenerate *IPBs* are devoid of an ontological disposition to have such ideas either appear in their minds or correspond to their mental states. What unregenerate minds do not perceive about God and reality (which also renders them culpable) are the relations or unions that exist between ideas and truth itself. For Edwards, all truth is an idea in the mind that has been divinely communicated to the mind, and which idea corresponds to God’s idea. If God communicates a perfect or total idea *p* in a mind, then all of its relations (*r*) are perfectly conceived and truth and knowledge obtain in that mind, i.e. there is an agreement or ‘*mutual consent*’ between the ideas of the perceiver and God. But if God communicates *p* only in part to an agent, *or* the agent is only capable of apprehending certain unions between ideas, say, non-special revelatory items, because the agent is not ontologically disposed to all the unions or relations of *p*, then the agent’s perception of the truth of *p* only corresponds to the degree with which there exists a consistency of the mind’s idea of *p* with divine communications *p(r)*: partial truths or secondary beauty may be perceived. The unregenerate mind, then, makes inaccurate connections between ideas; that is, in its failure to perceive how or whether two or more ideas belong together in *p(r)*, it contrives other (false) relations that exclude God from the equation.<sup>115</sup> Edwards, therefore, asserts their culpability in three things: (1) the failure of their ideas to agree with the ideas of God (about Himself and reality); (2) inconsistent and insufficient supposition of relations (which is falsehood); and (3)

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<sup>114</sup> ‘Treatise on Grace’ (c.1753), *Treatise*, 67. Emphasis mine.

<sup>115</sup> ‘The Mind’ 10, 15, and 71, *Works*6.



the suppression of the perceived union of certain ideas that have obtained in order to construct or adopt a set of relations which resonate with one's fallen nature (perversion). For lack of a disposition (Edwards' doctrine of *moral inability*) the unregenerate mind remains incapable of perceiving holiness or the beauty of God *as* God's excellency, and consequently, reality's relation or union to God as such.

So while the regenerate and the unregenerate abide in the same temporal realm and have access to the same empirical phenomena and speculative understanding of God, yet only the regenerate, by virtue of an ontological union, have epistemological access to the spiritual reality of God and His excellency both in Himself and manifestly.

### 3. *Comprehensive Theocentricity*

With a 'new spiritual sense', Edwards' project of reasoned Christianity shifts epistemological foundations, from first principles of reason to an idiosyncratic combination of intuition and revelation. It was upon this latter base that he was to build a logical system of Christian theology and worldview. The order in which Edwards describes his theocentric vision in the *Personal Narrative* is, therefore, significant; for it tells us precisely what he, by the illuminating operation of the Spirit, spiritually perceives and subsequently reconsiders about 'reality'. Here Edwards reports back on the beginnings of his new methodological approach to divinity. For him, the vision of God coincides with conversion, and therefore naturally stands first in order of significance and priority.

The scope and depth of the aesthetic and theocentric 'vision' or 'sense' extends with maturation (sanctification). Thus, Edwards' *Personal Narrative* continues by delineating the successive order of things affected by his new perspective. They are three in particular: Christ and redemption, the transcendence/immanence of God, and 'everything': nature, causes, consciousnesses, etc.

From about that time,<sup>116</sup> I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by him.... Not long after I first began to experience these things ... I was walking there, and looked up on the sky and clouds; there came into my mind, a sweet sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God ... I seem to see them both in a sweet conjunction.... After this my sense of divine things gradually increased, and became more and more lively, and had more of that inward sweetness. The appearance of everything was altered: there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything. God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything.<sup>117</sup>

Christ and redemption are mentioned first because of (i) their relation to special revelation and (ii) God's 'end of creation' summarily being accomplished in and through the

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<sup>116</sup> I.e. following his 'first' spiritual encounter with 'God and divine things' (*Works*16, 792).

<sup>117</sup> *Works*16, 792-94.



Son of God. In the Bible God said He would ultimately glorify Himself in the person and work of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Thus, God's 'end of creation' is the glorification of Himself through the perfect idea or image of Himself, viz. the Son crucified and resurrected. A 'new kind of apprehension of Christ,' therefore, is not categorically different than apprehending God as God. The connection between content, mode, and sensibility of perception first converge on the spiritual sense as the facilitator of 'right thoughts' and affections about God *through* Christ, or, similarly, God as Savior. Here Edwards' philosophical epistemology and soteriology merge together. Thus, when he writes, 'The first that I remember that ever I found anything of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things, that I have lived much in since, was on reading those words [from 1Tim.1:17]', we find that these words are the climatic conclusion to a sixteen-verse celebratory discourse on the gospel of Jesus Christ. The 'vision' of God as God is mediated by the Spirit as a 'vision' of God through the Christ of the Bible. Edwards' theocentrism, we learn, is never without an element of logocentricity: the Word 'inscripturated' serves as the 'means' by which God converts the soul.<sup>118</sup>

Upon the initial instance of union with Christ (regeneration) for the believer, the Spirit savingly initiates an exercise of faith.<sup>119</sup> Concomitant with the infusion of this disposition of faith and holiness is a diffusive apprehension of the 'excellency' of Christ. For Edwards, a 'sense' of the 'excellency of Christ' is the minimum epistemological effect that regeneration has upon the mind. Consequently, in the moment of salvation, it is not necessary for the spiritual sense to perceive the reality of God's transcendence/immanence or the divine glory in everything, only the 'excellency of Christ'. The former, Edwards would argue, pertains to the nature of sanctification, while the latter is of the essence of saving faith.<sup>120</sup>

The spiritual sense of 'the glorious majesty and grace of God' is not unlike the 'vision' of Christ, or God as God. Just as Christ is seen as both lamb and lion, human and divine, so the unincarnate Deity is perceived in His 'transcendent excellency' and immanent 'presence'.<sup>121</sup> Significantly, *this sense of the transcendence/immanence of God exists as the heart of Edwards' new theocentric vision*. In this capacity, the 'new spiritual sense' initiates his examination into how God could be 'really present' in temporal reality and, consequently, gives rise to a holistic and comprehensively theocentric worldview. Seen this way, Perry Miller would be correct to regard 'spiritual perception' the heart of Edwards' metaphysics. So while the perception of Christ takes priority in terms of salvation, the 'vision' of the 'sweet conjunction' of God-transcendent/God-immanent is the most important philosophically.

<sup>118</sup> *Works*9, 183, 459. See Chapter V, §4 on 'The Mediator of Means'.

<sup>119</sup> 'M'637, *Works*18, 167.

<sup>120</sup> See Chapter V, where Morimoto's and McDermott's respective positions on this point are rehearsed and refuted.

<sup>121</sup> *TAM*, *Works*11, 256-57. §263, *Banner-Works* 2:619.



The foundation of Edwards' theocentrism was laid in his youth. It was a principle that stayed with him throughout his college years and guided his reading of More, Locke, Newton, Smith, Norris, and others. But how it was to function as a regulative and overarching principle of his thinking apparatus seems only to have become clear to him following his 'vision' of God 'in everything'. To be sure, the seminal ideas of locating God's immediate presence in the world and doctrine of omnipresence, as well as the '*Ens Entium*' conclusion he drew from More's atomism, were already present in Edwards' theology prior to his conversion experience. Yet, his 'spiritual perception' thesis brings both the religious and metaphysical dimensions of reality together: the design, purpose, existence, and present beauty of the world are one in God. If nothing else, his encounter with God seems to have given him occasion to rethink the way he understood God and God's relation to everything.

The certainty and pervasiveness of Edwards' spiritual sense results from its being grounded in what, for him, is ultimately real, namely the Being of God—the ontological reality behind finite phenomena. This gives the fragility, changeableness, and material fabric of this world a depth dimension that includes a spiritual/moral aspect, as well as an eternal element. In short, God's beauty, glory, and design are understood as intrinsically present within Newton's physical universe and the world of intelligent existences, but with a new foundation – the laws of nature and laws of existence themselves were grounded in and entirely dependent upon God's being and, particularly, His will. (What this means in light of Edwards' idealism shall be discussed below.) For Edwards, anything other than a radically theocentric depiction of reality, in which God dwells immanently present, is false; a deviation from Scriptural revelation, and in total conflict with the data received by spiritual perception: in short, the world of unbelief, materialism, and deism.

### **3.a. *The Beautiful Matrix of Divine Presence***

The intellectual setting of the Enlightenment permitted Edwards to follow the prevailing tendency of the day, to reconsider the criterion of truth, to seek for some new principle of certitude amid the decay of antiquated systems of thought and unaccommodating alternative worldviews. But his spiritual perspective on reality confirmed for him that his criterion, the Bible, was truth. There was no need then to seek or develop another criterion; instead, the challenge for Edwards was to present his 'Biblical worldview' in a way that took account of the advances in sciences and conversations in philosophy. He believed that Biblical truth about reality—corroborated by spiritual sensibilities—was threefold: (1) There was a real distinction between affectional knowledge and mere intellectual knowledge that applied to the things of divinity;<sup>122</sup> (2) that that distinction emerged out of an ontological factor – a new

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<sup>122</sup> Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart*, 9; Miller, 'Sense of the Heart', 138.



disposition; and (3) that reality was saturated with divine presence, glory, beauty, design and purpose – in a word, with God Himself.

For Edwards, then, the question was neither, as ‘deistical’ religion pondered, ‘Is there a place for God in this world?’ nor, as the Christian rationalists mused, ‘How do we make a place for God in this world?’ To the spiritually perceptive ‘God’s excellencies’ were omnipresent throughout the created order, and for the unregenerate there was enough natural theology and general revelation to render them ‘inexcusable’, according to Edwards.<sup>123</sup> Nor, was there any longer a question in his mind about God’s sovereignty in predestination: supernatural light had transformed God’s arbitrariness into ‘an exceeding pleasant, bright and sweet doctrine.’ From this point onward, he would rationally defend ‘divine arbitrariness’.<sup>124</sup> Rather, he concerned himself at this time with finding a unifying principle that made sense of God’s immanent presence with corporal and incorporeal existences; some synoptic view by which created and uncreated entities were bridged and contextualized.

Therefore in the months immediately following June 1721 Edwards set his mind to working out how God transcendent could concurrently be God immanent. Some of his considerations were theological, some philosophical. In the philosophical essay ‘Of Being’, we find him setting forth an apodictic argument for the existence of God and concluding (again) with Henry More that ‘God is space’.<sup>125</sup> This philosophical essay, like nearly all that were to follow, culminates in a rash of theocentric corollaries purposed to evince the aetiological, teleological, cosmological, and ontological realities of God. ‘Of Being’ adds to his understanding of the Divine Presence in the universe and furthers his effort to assert the priority of the spiritual, but it does not explain what it is about God that concretely establishes His transcendent Being in the temporal realm. Nevertheless, Edwards persisted in his attempt to articulate the content of his aesthetic and theocentric vision of reality.

This effort can be seen in sermons drafted immediately after his conversion and throughout his New York pastorate;<sup>126</sup> sermons which demonstrate a shift in focus away from his earlier optimism in man’s rational abilities to ‘God’s glorious grace’ and ‘excellencies’. For example, in perhaps the first of these sermons, Zech. 4:7 ‘Glorious Grace’, where, while enjoined in a sustained celebration of ‘the work of redemption’, Edwards juxtaposes the ‘dreadful wickedness and the horrible ingratitude of man’s heart’ with the ‘glorious, amiable,

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<sup>123</sup> Rom. 1:20 (1743), Rom. 1:21 (1751).

<sup>124</sup> *PN, Works* 16, 792. That is, instead of trying to establish the independent rationality of Calvinist particularism, JE sets forth on a new agenda, viz. to present the arbitrariness and sovereignty of God as most ‘fitting’ or ‘suitable’ to reason. JE uses the aesthetic terms ‘fitting’ and ‘suitable’ to soften the causal inferences indicative of Ramist logic or syllogistical reasoning. Particularism becomes subsumed beneath rubric of the sovereign exercises of God and sovereignty under divine arbitrariness.

<sup>125</sup> *Works* 6, 202-03. More, *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings* (London, 1662), 165.

<sup>126</sup> During the summer of 1722 JE accepted a call to one half of a divided Presbyterian church in NYC, somewhere in the vicinity of Broadway and Wall Street. He was there from Aug. 1722, ministered for ten months, and departed by the end of April 1723 – the church having decided to reunite with the church they had left.



beautiful' being of God.<sup>127</sup> This is soon followed by a sermon on Ps. 89:6 with the doctrine, 'God is infinitely exalted in gloriousness and excellency above all created beings.' In this sermon Edwards ambitiously declares that 'God's excellencies' are the crux to 'the whole of Christianity'. 'God's excellencies', of course, is a direct referent to the aesthetic perception the spiritual sense engenders. Edwards seems to have consciously latched on to how the 'spiritual perception' of God transcendent may be concurrent with God immanent by an analysis of the effects of the spiritual sense itself. Such an analysis appears to be what he attempted during his first opportunity for regular preaching. If we were to suppose that he drafted this undated batch of New York sermons with a sense of semblance or coherence, where one sermon was associated theologically with another, it would not be difficult to see nearly the whole of his homiletical efforts in New York as a general and perhaps systematic explication of his emergent philosophy of spiritual perception. If this indeed were the case to which both internal and external evidence lend themselves, it would be no surprise to find a sermon on spiritual perception logically following 'Glorious Grace' and 'God's Excellencies', which 'Christ the Light of the World' may have done.<sup>128</sup>

Anticipating *M*782 and *A Divine and Supernatural Light* (1734), 'Christ, the Light of the World' (1723) publicly introduces Edwards' version of the 'new spiritual sense' by presenting the essence of his personal experience as the *sine qua non* of 'true religion':

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<sup>127</sup> Thomas A. Schafer dates extant sermons nos. 6-24 between Nov. 1722 to Apr. 1723, coinciding with '*M*' entries *a-z* and *aa-zz* ('Table 2', *Works13*, 91-92), but sermon nos. 3-5 between Aug.-Nov. 1722 to correspond with the New York pastorate, which began 10 Aug. 1722 (-26 Apr. 1723). I am convinced, however, that sermons 1-4 (and perhaps no.5, the 'Fragment on Seeking') were written prior to his conversion experience, that is, June 1721. Both Schafer and Wilson H. Kimnach affirm that this is a viable possibility due to the content and style of the compositions, and also because the orthography, water-marks, and ink used to ascertain undated materials permits such a supposition (JE did not regularly date his sermons until 1733). Upon this supposition I propose that no.6 on Zech. 4:7 (Nov. 1722), or perhaps no.5, is the first of the extant sermons written after June 1721, and that if he wrote any sermons between Aug.-Nov. 1722 they are either lost or consist of nos. 5 and 6. My reasons are five: (1) the 'foolscap' paper remains consistent for all of his extant MSS from Jan.1721-Dec.1722, and may be from as early as Sept. 1720, which permits the dating of sermons 3-5 prior to June 1721; (2) such sermons would have been necessary for candidating prior to the completion of his Yale graduate studies and call to New York; (3) Schafer's dating sermons nos. 3-5 between Aug.-Nov. 1722 is conjectural; (4) it is likely that if JE preached during the months of Aug.-Oct. he would have utilized sermons already drafted: this would be consistent with his practice in Bolton, Connecticut, and Northampton, Massachusetts; and (5) significantly, the content of the Zech 4:7 sermon marks a notable shift in theological content and emphasis from earlier sermons (and essays).

<sup>128</sup> *Works10*, 392-93; 416, 425. Indeed, the order of what I ascertain to be the nineteen (nos.6-24) extant sermons from the New York period (excluding no.5, 'Fragment on Seeking'), save for Zech. 4:7 (no.6), is uncertain. However, one may speculate that it is likely JE took the opportunity of regular preaching to systematically explicate his developing body of divinity. This supposition not only corresponds with his future habit of purposeful and occasioned preaching (e.g. future sermon series, or 'Thanksgiving' or 'Fast-Day' sermons, etc.), but also dispels any notion that JE was without a method, merely preaching random and isolated topical sermons (cf. Kimnach, 'General Introduction', *Works10*, 130-79). Internally, we find that theological themes or ideas present in one sermon continue (developmentally) in another. If the New York sermons were read by JE as a broad-based 'series,' then the order of the first seven sermons, for example, may have been no.6, 8, 16, 7, 11, 10, and 23.



Christ enlightens the soul by his Holy Spirit.... Jesus Christ, when he enlightens the mind, sends forth the Holy Spirit to dwell in the soul, to be as a continual internal light to manifest and make known spiritual things to the believer.<sup>129</sup>

The ‘spiritual things’ the illuminating activity of the Holy Spirit makes known are the infinite ‘excellency and beauty’ of God in Christ along with (in the words of Wilson Kimnach) ‘the subtler issue of human reality.’<sup>130</sup>

The beauty of God in everything simply means that the spectrum of human experience and existence is remarkably woven together with the reality of divine beauty. Divine beauty or excellence, then, is the key to understanding the ‘sweet conjunction’ of transcendence/immanence, to understanding how the eternal and temporal realms are integrated.<sup>131</sup> For Edwards, if spiritual perception entails the idea of the excellency or beauty of God, then God Himself must be intrinsically excellent or beautiful (it is at this point the idealism mentioned above comes into play).<sup>132</sup> Not only does Scripture confirm the aesthetic dimension of God’s reality for Edwards, but reason, a personal encounter, and the sensibility of spiritual perception are confirmatory also. It logically follows that, if God is an intrinsically excellent/beautiful being prior to the creation and that excellency/beauty is made spatio-temporally present, then God must possess an antecedent disposition within Himself to communicate that excellence/beauty in time and space.<sup>133</sup> Pushing the thought further, Edwards concludes that such a disposition in God could not be anything entirely distinct from what belongs to the essence of God and that God’s essence therefore must possess an excellent, beautifying disposition. But more on this last thought in the next chapter. Now we turn our attention to Edwards’ concept of ‘excellency’ to ascertain its ontological significance.

### 3.b. ‘EXCELLENCY’

The ‘Miscellanies’ begun during the New York period provide Edwards an outlet for working out the logic of divine beauty. These entries, developing the theme of God’s beauty as the central synoptic element of reality, plus the quasi-systematic, sermonic treatment of the

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 543.

<sup>130</sup> See Kimnach’s preface to this sermon. Cf. *Works*17, 64: ‘[T]o see God is this: it is to have an immediate and certain understanding of God’s glorious excellency and love. (1) ... I say direct and immediate to distinguish from a mere acknowledging that God is glorious and excellent by ratiocination, which is a more indirect and mediate way of apprehending things than intuitive knowledge.... (2) There is a certain understanding of his love; there is a certain apprehension of his presence.’

<sup>131</sup> ‘Beauty of the World’, *Works*6, 305-06.

<sup>132</sup> ‘Of Being’ [second stratum], *Works*6, 206. In this entry JE writes: ‘To follow from hence, that those beings which have knowledge and consciousness are the only proper and real substantial beings, inasmuch as the being of other things is only by these.’ In order for the spiritual idea of divine excellence to be real *ad extra* and *to the mind* of an *IPB* it must be both communicated in and perceived by the mind as *that* spiritual idea of God’s excellence.

<sup>133</sup> ‘M’87 and 89, *Works*13, 251-52, 253 (see also 92 and 93 [Autumn1723]). Cf. Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 173.



‘spiritual sense’, come to a climactic head in the philosophical essay ‘EXCELLENCY’.<sup>134</sup> In it Edwards links God’s beauty or excellence with the idea of divine comprehensiveness and, in turn, renders the whole of created existence a matrix of divine beauty. He arrives at this conclusion through an analysis of ‘excellency’ as something more than an aesthetic category.

As early as ‘M’42 (July 1723), Edwards begins to attach philosophical meaning to ‘excellency’ by characterizing spiritual things with it.<sup>135</sup> Soon after this, he explains that God, in particular, should be understood in terms of His ‘infinite greatness and excellency’ (‘M’44), and finally concludes that God and all that He does ‘is nothing but excellent’ (‘M’87). However, his philosophical intentions become clear in the essay, ‘EXCELLENCY’, where he provides a systematic treatment of the subject. He at once assumes that ‘excellency’ is the axiomatic principle of timology: it accounts for both moral and aesthetic value. Edwards borrows a definition of ‘excellency’ directly from Shaftesbury’s *Characteristicks*.<sup>136</sup> Shaftesbury wrote that, ‘all excellency is harmony, symmetry or proportion.’ This definition suited Edwards’ purposes well. Not that he had become a disciple of Shaftesbury, or that he found the Earl authoritative (Edwards indirectly criticizes Shaftesbury in *True Virtue* and ‘Book of Controversies’); it is just that, in his openness to new ideas (something Yale did not forbid), he was happy to utilize constructive ideas no matter where he found them. Consequently, he does not challenge Shaftesbury’s definition, but adopts it as a more fundamental metaphysical category than the Earl. ‘Excellency,’ Edwards ruminates, ‘therefore seems to consist in equality,’ otherwise,

... there is no beauty ... simple equality, without proportion, is the lowest kind of regularity and may be called simply beauty; all other beauties and excellencies may be resolved into it. Proportion is complex beauty.<sup>137</sup>

His real intentions for ‘excellency’ begin with the last statement: ‘Proportion is complex beauty.’ The complexity of proportion arises from and depends upon an equality of ratios. This provides the hypothesis that ‘excellency’ consists in equality. From this reflection comes the general theory: the more complex the composition, and the more its parts and their arrangements exhibit equalities of relation, the greater the ‘complex beauty’. As Edwards continues further, we find that complex beauty is not merely a combination of simple beauties; indeed, complex objects often have some ‘simple beauties omitted for the sake of the harmony of the whole.’ Furthermore, irregularities may even enhance the overall beauty

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<sup>134</sup> Originally drafted as ‘M’78, ‘EXCELLENCY’ was deleted and copied into a new and separate notebook, ‘The Mind’, in the summer of 1723. The original entry is reproduced in *Works*13, 245 n.8. Prior to ‘M’ 42, JE used terms ‘excellent’ and ‘excellency’ in a much more general way to mean quality, beauty, and attractiveness (see for instance, ‘M’ nos. a, aa, gg).

<sup>135</sup> Anderson, ‘EI’, *Works*6, 29-30.

<sup>136</sup> Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 2:12. JE refers to *Characteristicks* in ‘Natural Philosophy’, ‘Notes on Scripture’, and the ‘Catalogue’.

<sup>137</sup> ‘The Mind’ 1, *Works*6, 332-33.



by intensifying the complexity of the beauty. At this point Anderson remarks, ‘That equalities and proportions extending through the whole of a complex have a priority over those that are confined to parts, will become an important element in the general ontological theory toward which Edwards is moving.’<sup>138</sup> Indeed, all things—simple equalities, complex beauties, even deformities—exist together and are enveloped by a universal matrix of excellency, or, which is the same thing to Edwards, the beautiful being of God.<sup>139</sup>

The introduction of his general theory begins with the thought: ‘All beauty consists in similarness, and all identity between two consists in identity of relation.’ As a further clarification he says, ‘in identity of relation consists all likeness, and all identity between two consists in identity of relation.’<sup>140</sup> Here Edwards strives to account for all sameness or ‘likeness’ of qualities and quantities by a sameness of *relations*.<sup>141</sup> Anderson understands Edwards to speak of universals here and comments, ‘all universals, Edwards is plainly asserting—whatever can be common to different things—are relations ... relations alone are universal, and two things can exemplify or partake of the same universal only by virtue of themselves or their constituent parts standing in the same relations.’<sup>142</sup> Nonetheless, at this stage of his analysis the ontological weight of ‘relations’ is not yet felt.

It is only when Edwards advances his discussion of existence beyond the Aristotelian distinction between different categories of accidents and the idea of substance itself and combines both concepts in a category of dispositional relatedness that we sense the importance of relations in his system. ‘For being,’ he explains, ‘if we examine narrowly, is nothing else but proportion.’<sup>143</sup> Proportion, however, requires a plurality. Which leads Edwards to his universal definition of ‘excellency’: ‘The consent of being to being, or being’s consent to entity.’ The logic of which is, ‘The more the *consent* is, and the more extensive,

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<sup>138</sup> ‘EI’, *Works6*, 82.

<sup>139</sup> *V.i. c. III*, §5.a. ff, where I explain the ontological role of the reprobate in connection with this idea.

<sup>140</sup> *Works6*, 334.

<sup>141</sup> Earlier we noted this principle manifesting itself in JE’s epistemology: the affectional perception of ‘truth’ (and goodness) consists of a corresponding relation of the mind to a given idea. In his metaphysics this means that truth is the consistency and agreement of our ideas—‘communicated immediately to us by God’—with the ideas of God (‘The Mind’ 6 and 10, *Works6*, 340, 341. Cf. Locke’s definition of truth as ‘the joining or separating of signs, as the things signified by them do agree or disagree with one another,’ and of knowledge as, ‘the perception of the connection or agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas’ [*Essay*, bk. IV, 5, 2; IV, 1, 2]). Truth is not *our* association of simple ideas from sensation, but rather ‘the determination, and fixed mode, of God’s exciting ideas in us,’ and exciting them ‘so that truth in these things is an agreement of our ideas with that series in God.’ Therefore, ‘Truth is the perception of the relations there are between ideas’ (*Works6*, 344-45, 398). So where there is a *relationship* by divine constitution in between *ideas*, that relationship *is* the truth. Truth, then, has ‘excellency’ of its own which consists of mental relations with respect to ideas. In his coherence theory of truth, when a relation or sharing in an idea(s) holds, a proposition is true.

<sup>142</sup> ‘EI’, *Works6*, 83. In ‘The Mind’ 43, JE writes: ‘Many of our universal ideas are not arbitrary ... the union [i.e. relation] of ideas is not always arbitrary, but unavoidably arising from the nature of the soul, which is such that the thinking of one thing ... cited the thought of other things that are like it’ (361).

<sup>143</sup> *Works6*, 336.



the greater the excellency.’<sup>144</sup> But before we proceed further we must ascertain what Edwards means by ‘consent’, and why the concept of ‘excellency’ hinges upon it.

‘Consent’ finds explanation in ‘The Mind’ 45, also titled ‘EXCELLENCE’. There, Edwards claims that there is no proper ‘consent’ but that of minds, ‘even of their wills’; which, he says, ‘when it is of minds towards minds, it is love, and when of minds towards other things it is choice.’<sup>145</sup> He has in mind to explain ‘consent’, not in terms of permission, sympathy or complacency with regard to something, but in a highly specialized metaphysical sense that bespeaks its Latin derivation: a mental coming together *with* feeling. Hence, ‘consent’ almost invariably means ‘love’ for him. In this qualified sense, consent entails a *giving* of one’s whole mind to an idea *p*, but also the *receiving* of the [other] mind that suggests/communicates *p*. That is, consent involves the unified consciousness of man; it is not merely a principle of the will,<sup>146</sup> but of the affections and understanding as well. Its ontological significance, therefore, lies in its being ‘a constitutive principle of intelligent perceiving being’, according to one commentator.<sup>147</sup> That is, in Edwards’ system, human consent is the very principle that constitutes the being of a union; it possesses a union-making capacity.

So when Edwards considers the ‘excellence’ of ‘other things’ (i.e. material entities), he borrows the meaning of both ‘excellence’ and ‘consent’ from spiritual or mental things, for both are really spiritual/mental/moral concepts. For example, when an *IPB* ‘consents’ to an external or sensible thing *x*, it finds *x* ‘agreeable’ to its consciousness. The ‘agreeableness’ of *x* to the mind lies in its equality, likeness, or proportion – that is, to its aesthetic presence. The mind ‘agrees’ with such ‘secondary beauties’, as Edwards calls them, because they concretely embody or represent the nature of mental existence as an agreement between minds.<sup>148</sup> The mind chooses *x* because *x* corresponds with that which the mind perceives to be most ‘agreeable’ to its constitutional tendencies, namely ‘the consent to being’ or existence. An *IPB*, then, inclines to *x qua* ‘being’, or, in other words, God *qua* its own existence.<sup>149</sup> Strictly speaking, the consent between the mind and *x* is not mutual, but mono-directional. It therefore cannot be designated ‘love’ or ‘spiritual’ in the proper sense. Nevertheless, because it is *like* the agreement between minds, Edwards borrows the word ‘consent’ from spiritual things.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid. See Delattre’s insightful analysis of JE’s thoughts on beauty, in which he emphasizes the philosophical notion of beauty itself as opposed to JE’s well-known concept of the sensibility of beauty (*Beauty and Sensibility*; and ‘Beauty and Theology’, 60-79 reprinted in *Critical Essays on Jonathan Edwards*, Scheick, (Ed.), 136-49.

<sup>145</sup> *Works*6, 362.

<sup>146</sup> Thomas Aquinas makes consent the sixth movement of human action – the third of the will (*Summa*, I-II, Q15). Strictly speaking, for Aquinas, consent is an act of the will acquiescing in a judgment of mind, i.e. the will’s determination to implement the verdict of the mind that something is worthwhile.

<sup>147</sup> Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility*, 208.

<sup>148</sup> Here I could make mention to JE’s ‘Shadows and Images’ but instead see the analysis of JE’s metaphysics with respect to his theology of nature and hermeneutic of typology by Mason I. Lowance in *Works*11.

<sup>149</sup> Here JE shows a remarkable likeness not to Shaftesbury but Plotinus (see *Enneads* 1.6.2).

<sup>150</sup> Again, I refer the read to Lowance, et. al., ‘EI’ in *Works*11.



With regard to sentient beings, however, the correspondence *is* between minds. ‘Agreeableness’ may now be spoken of in terms of ‘love’. Consent as love represents mental, that is to say, an intellectual and inclinational ‘congruity’ between minds.<sup>151</sup> No longer does one indirectly consent to the mind (or idea) behind external or sensible beauties, now mind directly consents to mind. For Edwards, the congruity or consent between minds carries ontological, not merely forensic, weight. ‘Consent’, in Edwards, is the *mutual* reception of one mind to another that they should actively join themselves to one another. It is the act of the unified mind’s capitulation to the (beautiful) idea of shared existence—a union.<sup>152</sup> Consent not only establishes, as it were, the terms of ‘agreement’ or love between minds, but it ontologically constitutes the union itself.<sup>153</sup> Not just ideas are shared, but the existence of the other mind. Mind *A* does not simply have ‘agreement’ with mind *B*, but *B* becomes part of *A*, and *A* part of *B*, as they instantiate mental, spiritual, and moral excellence. The ‘excellency’ of the relationship consists not in two distinct minds that love, but one with a plurality.<sup>154</sup> Therein lay its complexity, proportionality, and (relative to God) ontological superiority over mono-directional consent. The union or relation itself instantiate excellency or proportion, that is, being itself.

More will be said of consent in Chapter III. For now, we note that consent involves the unified consciousness, as an active exercise of the constitutive dispositions of *IPB*.<sup>155</sup>

Returning to our discussion, Edwards uses consent as a quantifying and qualifying factor in the determination of a being’s existence. For him, the more ‘agreement’ or consent between being (an existence) and beings (another created existence) and ‘being in general’ (God plus all created existences), the more proportion or ‘excellency’ being possesses – where proportion and excellence are the aesthetic quantifiers of spiritual existence: the more excellence, the more perfect or ‘substantial’ the being. Substantiality constitutes the ‘realness’ of existence measured by its mental/spiritual/moral likeness—*through a consenting relation* (its qualifier)—to God’s being, which is pure arbitrary mind or spirit (*M* 1263). ‘One alone, without reference to any more, cannot be excellent,’ Edwards explains,

for in such a case there can be no manner of relation no way, and therefore no such thing as consent. Indeed, what we call one may be excellent, because of a consent of parts, or some consent of those in that being that are distinguished into a plurality some way or other. But in a being that is absolutely without any plurality there cannot be excellence, for there can be no such thing as consent or agreement.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>151</sup> ‘*M*’729, *Works*18, 356. Cf. Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 73-74.

<sup>152</sup> ‘*M*’568, *Works*18, 105. Cf. Bennett Ramsey, ‘The Ineluctable Impulse: “Consent” in the Thought of Edwards, James, and Royce’, 302-22.

<sup>153</sup> *Works*6, 362. Cf. ‘*M*’568, *Works*18, 105.

<sup>154</sup> As a further result, I say over-against Lee’s assertion that JE ‘collapses’ properties and substance itself into a single category of disposition, there is no such ‘collapse’. See Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 11-14, 49-51 and 77-78.

<sup>155</sup> Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility*, 208f.

<sup>156</sup> ‘The Mind’ 1, *Works*6, 337. Cf. ‘*M*’117, *Works*13, 283-84.



‘Excellency’ or being consists, therefore, *in relations*.<sup>157</sup> Beauty is proportion; proportion is excellence; and excellency is relational plurality or existence itself. Thus, to be is to be in relation – that is, a mental relation.<sup>158</sup> Excellency emerges, then, as the aesthetic expression of relations of consent – the principle components of ontological structures.<sup>159</sup>

In the above quote Edwards of course refers to the ontological Trinity: God’s essential excellence consists of necessary relations.<sup>160</sup> Within His Triune being God’s excellency ‘consists in the love of Himself’. God not only knows Himself perfectly (hence, the Son), but also perfectly loves that knowledge of Himself (the Spirit). Thus, the excellency between the Father and the Son is the Spirit. Such love is eternal and ‘of infinite proportions ... the sum of all perfection.’<sup>161</sup> Yet God has, as it were, *another* excellent relation – to the creation.

Having reached this conclusion, Edwards explains God’s comprehensiveness in terms of excellence or beauty, agreeable to his aesthetic vision of God. He reasons in his notebooks in the following manner: ‘God is excellent’ and ‘infinitely the most beautiful being’, therefore His relations are perfectly excellent.<sup>162</sup> And if He is related to phenomenal reality, then that relation must be excellent and beautiful (just as the Bible and the spiritual sense evidenced). But since God is the One ‘seen’ present and acting in that reality, then somehow He must be immediately present with it, for what appears is not the beauty of another, but God’s won excellency and beauty.<sup>163</sup> And since God is one and His excellence (i.e. relations) is ontologically inseparable from His being (for it is His being), then the very beauty of God not only immediately extends into the created order, but the created order itself only exists in, with, and as, a matrix of divine beauty. God’s beauty is, as it were, the beautiful landscape out of which the flower of creation emerges as an extension or instance of the landscape.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Cf. Anderson, ‘EI’, *Works6*, 30: ‘He [JE] concluded [in his analysis of excellency] that the relations of a thing to others are the fundamental condition of its existence, and that “being, if we examine narrowly, is nothing else but proportion.”’

<sup>158</sup> Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 77-80. *V.i.* (§3.c) for the connection of this idea with JE’s idealism.

<sup>159</sup> Through his use of ‘proportionality’ or the *analogia relationis*, JE shows ontological similarities with Thomas Aquinas. See Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 325ff; and Jinkins’ response in “‘The Being of Beings’”, 175-77. Compare also Lisska’s analysis of Aquinian ‘*adequatio*’ and its relation to the aesthetic qualifier ‘proportion’ with respect to ontology in *Aquinas’ Theory of Natural Law*.

<sup>160</sup> Anderson explains the significance of JE’s innovative conception of the Trinity, by saying: ‘it seems evident that his new concept of being, when applied to the divine perfections, stands in sharp contrast to the long tradition of philosophical theology into which he was born. God’s goodness is not grounded in the absolute unity and simplicity of his being, but belongs to him only as he constitutes a plurality involving relations’ (‘EI’, *Works6*, 84; cf. Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility*, 117-24).

<sup>161</sup> ‘The Mind’ 45, *Works6*, 365, 363.

<sup>162</sup> JE makes a similar connection regarding God’s holiness (Hopkins, *Life and Character*, 29-30). He further explains in *EofC* that God’s holiness is His excellency, which ‘chiefly consists in a regard to HIMSELF’ (*Works8*, 421-22). Concerning God, then, love and consent may be collapsed into the theological category of holiness.

<sup>163</sup> Recalling JE’s formula: All being is proportion and proportion is excellency or being. In No.45 he goes on to say, ‘doubtless, in metaphysical strictness and propriety, He is, as there is none else. He is likewise infinitely excellent, and all excellence and beauty is from Him’ (*Works6*, 364). Thus all ontological excellence or excellency must both in and of God.

<sup>164</sup> See ‘M’ 42, 46, 87, 93; ‘The Mind’ 1, 45, 62, 64; *Works8*, 551.



Significantly, then, Edwards' thoughts on 'excellency' are a major development in his movement toward a systematically theocentric and panentheistic conception of reality, particularly as 'excellency' becomes an established concept in his metaphysical thought in conjunction with 'being-in-relation' (Being as manifest). Indeed, the concept of 'excellency' not only plays a prominent role in his understanding of God's cosmological and teleological relation to the world, but also marks the beginning of the evolutionary process by which Edwards would relate these concepts to the ontological nature of all things (en route to a systematic response to deistic religion), which, in turn, determinatively affects the knowledge content and functional role of human being.

### 3.c. *Ideal Existence*

The mechanics of Edwards' concept of 'excellency' and its role in his emergent doctrine of divine comprehensiveness, hinge on his principles of perception, which are only properly understood in conjunction with his philosophical idealism. For instance, in 'M'87 he writes:

It appears also from the nature of happiness, which is the perception of excellency; for intelligent beings are created to be the consciousness of the universe, that they may perceive what God is and does. This is nothing else but to perceive the excellency of what he is and does. Yea, he is nothing but excellent; and all that he does, nothing but excellent.

The perception of God's essential excellence and the perception of that excellence in what He does (e.g. create, sustain, and exhibit Himself in the universe) are synonymous: God active and manifest immanently is none other than God transcendent.<sup>165</sup> But it must be remembered that this 'excellency' or beauty of God is *spiritual*, *moral*, and *mental*; for, in Edwards, mental or spiritual excellencies are the highest degree of being.<sup>166</sup> God, therefore, is pure spirit, a perfectly arbitrary mind, and absolutely moral.<sup>167</sup> The perception of divine excellency in, say, a tree, then, is a thoroughly spiritual/moral/mental vision, an apprehension of *primary beauty*.<sup>168</sup> The mere apprehension of the qualities that constitute the corporeal ('natural'),

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<sup>165</sup> Here the temptation to draw correlations with Malebranche's ideas and 'vision of God' from *The Search After Truth* is both warranted and strong. Malebranche, of course, agreed with Descartes that ideas play an essential role in knowledge and perception. But whereas Descartes' ideas are mental entities, or modifications of the soul, Malebranche argues that the ideas function in human cognition are *in* God—they just are the essences and ideal archetypes that exist in the divine understanding. As such, they are eternal and independent of objective, necessary truth. For JE, however, they are dependent upon other minds if they are to have an *ad extra* reality.

<sup>166</sup> JE writes: 'One of the highest excellencies is love. As nothing else has proper being but spirits, and as bodies are but shadow of being, therefore, the consent of bodies to one another, and the harmony that is among them, is but the shadow of excellency. The highest excellency, therefore, must be the consent of spirits one to another' ('The Mind' 1, *Works*6, 337). Simply then, consent or love, is the highest spiritual/ mental/moral excellence. JE considers the 'consent of being to being' existence itself.

<sup>167</sup> 'The Mind' 1, *Works*6, 336; 'M'64, *Works*13, 235; 'M'1263, *PJE*, 184-93.

<sup>168</sup> 'Subjects to be Handled in the Treatise on the Mind' Nos. 15, 20, 26, 56, *Works*6, 389, 390, 393; 'The Mind' 1, *Works*6, 338.



*secondary beauty*<sup>169</sup> of the tree does not attain to the spiritual reality behind the bare sense perception of the tree. For the spiritually perceptive, however, the tree also exhibits a ‘primary’ or ‘spiritual’ beauty in addition to its ‘secondary’ or ‘common’ beauty. To be sure, the world’s secondary beauty is derived from primary beauty, or God. As Edwards writes in ‘The Mind’ 45, ‘all excellence and beauty is derived from Him,’ but only as ‘a shadow of His [primary beauty].’ For this reason, Edwards says that the whole of reality can be understood as a matrix of divine beauty, but with different levels or accesses of perception: natural perception corresponds with secondary beauty and the natural laws established to effect the regular perception of such equalities; while on the other hand, spiritual perception corresponds with primary beauty, and the arbitrary operation of the Spirit to resonate spiritual realities in the mind of the regenerate perceiver.<sup>170</sup> (This is what Sang Hyun Lee argues in ‘Edwards on God and Nature’, viz. that there is *more* to the world of phenomena than merely secondary beauty, images and types. There is a primary beauty dimension and antitypes to be perceived as well.)

McClymond’s analysis notes that spiritual perception’s *content* consists of ‘excellency’. So, if God’s excellency pertains to both His internal and external relations, and if the idea of relations is communicated to/in the mind by God, then those ideas become an excellent or ontological relation for the recipient. Which is to say, the idea of God that the Spirit communicates to the minds of regenerates is itself the Divine Being. Again, the difference in perception between the regenerate and the unregenerate concerns the perceiver’s ontic state of mind. To speak more accurately about ‘being’ in Edwards’ philosophical idealism, one must say that ‘to be is to be *perceived* and *to perceive* in relation.’ However, one’s dispositional constitution or (better) one’s ontic propensities toward certain relations (e.g. self, others, God or the sum of all existence) determine whether one has access to the affectional-intellectual perception facilitated through each respective ‘level’ of relation. But this caveat does not vitiate Edwards’ idealism, since all respective ‘levels’ of relation are actualized through other—i.e. regenerate—individuals, whereby their objects of perception gain phenomenological reality and theoretically persist through their necessary interrelatedness in the matrix. In the case of spiritual realities, access comes through union with the Spirit of Christ, who effectively communicates such ideas – ideas of primary beauty – in the rectified consciousnesses of regenerates.

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<sup>169</sup> ‘The Mind’ 1, *Works*6, 333, 335. In *TV*, JE articulates the ethical translation of these aesthetic-ontological concepts (*Works*8, 539-44, 564-66, 573-74, et passim). Cf. Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 110-22.

<sup>170</sup> Again, the parallels with not just Hutcheson or Shaftesbury but also Plotinus’ thought are remarkable. In *Enneads* (1.6.2) Plotinus differentiates between ‘primary’ and ‘sensible’ (agreeable to JE’s ‘secondary’) beauty. Primary beauties are mental (2.9.17), while sensible beauties are ‘shadows and images’ of intellect, which point beyond themselves to invisible beauties of ‘the One’ (1.6.4). But when Plotinus says, ‘the things in this world are beautiful by participating in form’; JE avers that they are of God.



Such thinking constrains Edwards to reconsider his earlier approach to unregenerate humanity, who obviously perceive ‘secondary’ beauties. At first, Edwards shows confidence in man’s ability to apprehend rationally and embrace confessional truths about God, salvation, and reality. Now, however, he recognizes that natural-man’s rejecting and ‘suppressing the truth in unrighteousness’ (Rom. 1:18), particularly the truth of God’s temporal presence, concerns not so much a problem with the reasonableness of Christian particularism or theology proper, but with natural-man’s perception of reality itself.<sup>171</sup> So, for example, while the ‘spiritual’ matter of the immortality of the soul might be believed according to Plato’s reasoning in *Phaedrus*, yet the ideas ‘which be of the Spirit’, namely, the beauty and excellency of the divine reality, can only be apprehended affectionally *as* spiritual and therefore real upon an ‘alteration made in the soul.’<sup>172</sup> The differentiation between kinds of beauty concerns the perceiver primarily and the object secondarily.<sup>173</sup>

The idea of God’s excellency in reality—be it nature, events, etc.—must be an idea which resonates *in* the minds of perceivers for it to be ‘real’ to them. In order for it to resonate the soul must be altered by ‘communicating and infusing grace and holiness’, that is, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, then, operating in and through the unified consciousness of the regenerate person, communicates the reality of God in the created order in the same way that the Spirit illuminates the Scriptures. Which is to say, the Spirit of God is the One who communicates the idea of ‘God as God is in Himself’ to a regenerate mind; He is the One who authenticates that idea by conveying an epistemic notion of reality and certainty; and He is the One who regulates the intensity and frequency of the perception of God temporally present.<sup>174</sup> Just as one requires the Spirit to discern the spiritual sense of Scripture, so too one needs the Spirit to interpret the spiritual sense of reality, or (better) reality as spiritual.<sup>175</sup>

Edwards anchors certain crucial concepts in his philosophical-theology by leaving the determination of how and which ideas will be perceived by created intelligent minds to God’s purposeful resolve. Theologically, for Edwards, God’s determination of which ideas man may

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<sup>171</sup> ‘Nakedness of Job’ (c.1722), *Works*10, 406.

<sup>172</sup> ‘M’675, *Works*18, 236.

<sup>173</sup> I say ‘the object secondarily’ because any given object, though manifesting secondary beauty, must have the *idea* of its primary beauty immediately communicated to a perceiving mind in order to make it ‘real’ in time and space and to God *ad extra*.

<sup>174</sup> Parallels with Malebranche’s ‘vision of God’ resurface. For Malebranche, and in accordance with Descartes’ divorce of mind and matter, matter cannot act upon mind, and mind cannot produce its own ideas, because minds are spiritual and require a greater being to move them (matter, for Malebranche is inert and passive). *Therefore we see all things in God, for God is the causal presence in reality which gives rise to our ideas and knowledge of things*. Which is to say, of all the things that come under our knowledge, we know none but God in Himself without the mediation of any idea – bodies and their properties are seen in God by their ideas. As for our own soul, it is known only by consciousness, i.e. by our sensations. JE’s matrix of beautiful being, or ‘being-as-manifest’ is not far removed from Malebranche in this respect. It is no wonder that both have been charged with owning pantheistic schemes. (See JE’s explanation of how ‘sensations’ may be said to be the cause of our ideas in ‘The Mind’ Nos. 40 and 51, *Works*6, 358-59, 368.)

<sup>175</sup> ‘M’64, *Works*13, 235; ‘Images’ No. 166, *Works*11, 112.



perceive secures Divine omnipotence, omniscience, and sovereignty. Soteriologically, it fixes firmly God's predestination of all creatures: man has no access to the converting idea of 'Christ's excellencies' unless God determines to communicate it. Thus 'Old Lights', who argued during the Great Awakening for the increase and practice of divine knowledge from strictly rationalistic principles, were operating according to Edwards from a completely different epistemological and ontological paradigm. They needed to recognize the nature, content, and mode of spiritual realities with respect to states of mind, that God determines – which, of course, 'Old Lights' failed to do.

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In Jonathan Edwards, reality is a matrix of divine beauty; it is what he 'perceived' about existence when he analyzed God's presence in the world. This matrix consists of both secondary beauties, which are merely indicators of the greater reality beyond them, and primary beauties. To perceive either is to experience something of the divine mind, but at different levels of sensibility – either naturally and indirectly or spiritually and directly. And for Edwards, this difference makes all the difference in the world when it comes to 'true religion'. The former pertains to common morality and natural religion – the system of deistical religion, while the latter typifies Spirit-generated, virtuous religion – the system of evangelical Calvinists.

God's relation to the created order, as Edwards envisions it, is simply the excellent relation the Divine Being has to Himself beyond His innertrinitarian perfections.

#### **2.d. *Correspondence with Scripture***

The Bible also holds an important role in the spiritual perception of divine excellence within temporal reality. 'The Book of Scripture', according to Edwards, provides the objective hermeneutic for reading 'The Book of Nature',<sup>176</sup> through which a host of primary beauties manifest themselves. The ability to perceive spiritually divine realities in the world of natural phenomena is not without boundaries: one simply cannot ascribe a subjective meaning to the objective reality perceived by the spiritual sense. Edwards claims that the Bible, in conjunction with the illuminating operation of the Holy Spirit, contextualizes and clarifies the significance of spiritual signifiers outside of the pages of Scripture,

by declaring to us those spiritual mysteries that are indeed signified or typified in the constitution of the natural world; and secondly, in actually making application of the signs and types in the book of nature as representations of those spiritual mysteries in many circumstances.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> One of the alternative names JE gave to the notebook 'Images of Divine Things' was 'The Book of Nature and Common Providence.'

<sup>177</sup> 'Images' No. 156, *Works* 11, 106. Cf. Nos. 8, 19, 43, 70, and MS 'Blank Bible', 656, where JE writes: "'Tis evident by Jn 11:50-52 that occurrences in the history of the New Testament as well as the Old, have a mystery in them, and that they are ordered on purpose and shadow forth spiritual things.'



Consequently, the contents of Scripture and reality's spiritual significations are not dissimilar: the spiritually perceptive mind 'senses' in some given object, event, or idea not only the 'sweet conjunction' of God-transcendent/God-immanent, but also some Scriptural truth(s) regarding redemption and the divine attributes associated with that work. This implies that the redemptive subject matter in Scripture possesses a correspondence somewhere in nature. However, both subjective and objective factors regulate the connection between reality's extra-biblical data and the contents of Scripture. Subjectively, the illuminating effect of the Spirit resonates in the regenerate mind such and such an idea of divinity that agrees in some way to a divinely inspired idea in Scripture. The Spirit determines which idea or set of ideas in some extra-biblical source will correspond to the idea of a certain biblical truth(s).<sup>178</sup> Edwards sets forth these principles in the notebook 'Images'.<sup>179</sup> Objectively, the nature of that connection is determined by something *in* Scripture itself – the hermeneutical principle of typology. For Edwards, typology took on a broadened significance that comprehended not only Scripture, but also nature and history. In this view, types were found not only in the Old Testament; the phenomenal world and all the movements of world history also declared divine truths – indeed, even the Divine Being Himself. Accordingly, typological associations (where the type is only the representation or shadow of a thing, but the antitype is the very substance, and the true thing) extend beyond the boundaries of Old Testament types fulfilled in Christocentric New Testament antitypes, to include every facet of temporal existence; but with this crucial qualification: the whole range of typological associations in reality prevail only as extensions of the idea of redemption (and all that it entails) in the Bible. As Edwards writes: 'Wherever we are and whatever we are about, we may see divine things excellently represented and held forth, and it will abundantly tend to confirm the Scriptures, for there is an excellent agreement between these things and the Holy Scriptures.'<sup>180</sup>

By limiting the extent of the interpretation of extra-biblical signifiers and types to the theological themes of the Bible, Edwards was clearly establishing Christian boundaries for his theology of nature. Certainly an American Indian might claim an ecstatic vision of The Great Spirit, but if it did not correspond with the objective measure for authentic revelatory

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<sup>178</sup> To be sure, JE did not suggest that the Spirit associates ideas in and out of Scripture in a contingent, moment-to-moment fashion. Rather, the connection between some instance of divine excellence in nature and some idea in Scripture, though potentially differing from one point in time to another, are pre-established connections according to God's eternal and infinite wisdom. The differences between ideas  $x(T_1)$  and  $y(T_2)$ , though they share identical circumstances, save for time, are accounted for by God's telic purpose for each specific time segment.

<sup>179</sup> Lowance explains that, 'The central thesis of 'Images' [reproduced in *Works11*] ... is that all "outward" and created things are specifically designated by God to "represent spiritual things." This thesis, he [JE] maintains, can be justified, even demonstrated, both from the testimony of Scripture and from independently discoverable facts concerning the agreement between natural objects and spiritual things' ('EI', *Works11*, 7).

<sup>180</sup> 'Images' No. 70, *Works11*, 74.



encounter—the Bible—then such an experience proves false.<sup>181</sup> The Spirit who illuminates the pages of Scripture, is the same Spirit who facilitates spiritual perception and communicates the biblically oriented content of the same. The reason for their correspondence is plain: the ideas of Scripture and the spiritual truths of nature are one, that is, consistent;<sup>182</sup> they are of the same divine mind and communicated by the same Spirit to achieve a like effect, namely, a corresponding beauty, or an instance of excellency between minds: the divine mind in the idea of nature's spiritual type and the divine mind united to the regenerate soul that resonates that idea. The resulting 'congruency' of the natural type to Scripture constitutes spiritual truth. Thus we find Edwards still operating within the boundaries of the Reformed tenet of *sola scriptura*, a tenet depended upon a view of scriptural interpretation that was guided by what Luther and Calvin called 'the witness of the Spirit', which, in the words of Mason Lowance, 'identified the presence of grace in the soul as the basis for interpretational circumspection and authority. [Edwards's] typological interpretation was also subject to this principle.'<sup>183</sup> Indeed, for Edwards, only the regenerate – those who possessed the new spiritual sense – knew of God's primary beauty or excellency. The full meaning of types in Scripture, nature and history were closed to the natural-man and reprobate.

Nevertheless, Edwards maintains that unregenerate readers of God's word and observers of nature could derive some idea of God's person and power (*v.i.* Chapters IV and V), yet only the regenerate know of God's beauty or excellency; only they sense the 'reality' that corresponds with Scripture. Likewise, the full meaning of types remains closed to the natural-man.<sup>184</sup> For Edwards, the 'light' that the Spirit imparts in conversion enables the regenerate to comprehend more fully the harmony of creation, human experience, and redemption as conveyed in Scripture. Meanwhile, the beauty of the world for the natural-man remains a 'shadow' of the spiritual or true reality of the world – a distant 'secondary beauty'.

Typological associations are frequently Edwards' frame of reference for communicating the content and contextual elements of the spiritual sense, that is, the world which so frequently serves as the medium for the spiritual language of God.<sup>185</sup> His appeal to the new sense through the mediation of concrete ideas and history prevents him not only from being labeled an audacious mystic, but gives him signs and signifiers, as well as a biblically regulated hermeneutic of typology and analogy to help articulate what is almost inarticulable. In this scheme, all of God's creative activities and works of providence become, 'a kind of

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<sup>181</sup> 1John 3:10 (1756).

<sup>182</sup> 'Images' No. 70, *Works* 11, 74.

<sup>183</sup> 'EI', *Works* 11, 10.

<sup>184</sup> That scriptural typology is reserved for the benefit of the regenerate see, *Works* 11, 192.

<sup>185</sup> Natural types were elements of a much larger all-encompassing system for JE. The 'end of creation' was God's communication of Himself—and thereby His glory—to the unified mind of his intelligent perceiving creatures (see 'M' 243). 'The universe itself', writes Lowance, 'was part of that divine self-communication, an act performed every moment by the power of God' ('EI', *Works* 11, 9).



voice or language of God, to instruct intelligent beings in things pertaining to himself.’<sup>186</sup> Edwards cannot but recognize the mediating factors of reason, nature, society, and history; for Scripture, reason, and his spiritual perception only convey the reality of it. His is a realistic conception of immediacy in which God, through ideas, enters directly into our consciousness ‘in, with, and under’ our total environment.<sup>187</sup> In one sense, he can say that God has been pleased to mediate (emanate) Himself through a matrix of divine beauty to accommodate the creature’s inferiority to His infinite and Holy Being. But this ‘end’, of course, is subordinate to another end: the glorification of God through the perception of His ‘manifest excellencies’. Besides, when mutual consent obtains, that is, when the regenerate human agent perceives spiritually the spiritual being in and behind the type – be it in nature, events, etc. – the medium or matrix is recognized affectionally as God *ad extra*.

The natural-man can notionally learn something of this ‘language’ and hear something of this ‘voice of God’ but it will not seem *real* to him and neither will he appreciate it, nor find it ‘agreeable’ to his being. Plainly, Edwards was making a statement against those who claimed Christianity had to be based ultimately on the principles of reason, those adherents of natural theology and rationalist disciples of John Locke – ‘freethinkers’ and deists. They were without the Spirit, and thus contemplated reality with an epistemological (and, antecedently, an ontological) handicap.<sup>188</sup>

#### 4. *Concluding Remarks*

Jonathan Edwards claims he came face-to-face, as it were, with ultimate and personal reality in an encounter with God. This event for him was a conversion experience that embodied the truth about reality – a reality that could only be adequately described through metaphors and analogies because of its spiritual basis.

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<sup>186</sup> ‘Images’ No. 77, *Works11*, 79. Cf. Knight, ‘Learning the Language of God’, 531-51.

<sup>187</sup> Elwood, *PTJE*, 90-93.

<sup>188</sup> Lowance explains how JE’s typology was a ‘medium’ (middle way) between those who, in the works of JE, ‘cry down all types’ (i.e. advocates of natural theology, Enlightenment rationalism, and deism in particular), those who ‘are turning all into nothing but allegory’ (i.e. Roman Catholic and Anglican advocates of the ancient Alexandrian approach), and ‘the way of the rabbis’ (‘Types’, *Works11*, 151): ‘While Latitudinarians like Locke saw revelation as confirming the “reasonableness of Christianity” so long as faith and reason were kept within their proper “boundaries,” the Deists did not—Herbert of Cherbury separated revealed truth from self-evident truth and thereby regulated revelation to a subsidiary, and therefore doubtful status. Those influenced by Herbert sought to rest their definition of true religion on the epistemological foundations of human reason and the laws of nature ... Edwards affirmed both the literal meaning and historical reliability of the biblical narratives in his response to deistical criticism ... In his opinion prophecy and typology, though different modes of discourse, could not be arbitrarily separated. The trustworthiness of the Old Testament and its prophetic content was essential to his view of typology. Typology itself was somewhat prophetic and its antitypes eschatological’ (‘EI’, *Works11*, 11-13).



From the time of his conversion when he claimed the ability of spiritual perception, Edwards began to connect all things, their existence and telic purposes, with the one theocentric vision of God's self-glorification. His theological 'vision' of God-immanent moved him to consider how God could be so, and how the world stood with relation to God's Being. In doing so, Edwards shows a remarkable aptitude for thinking through and creatively expressing his confession-based beliefs, articulating them in a way that was integrated with its spirituality but was never simply an abstraction or intellectualization of an experience.

'Excellency' as relational existence harmonized and unified all of reality for Edwards.<sup>189</sup> The world should not be thought of as completely outside and other than God, but as God projecting, emanating the idea of Himself *ad extra*. Thus, the general beauty of the universe or the whole of 'universal proportion' may be considered a matrix of divine beauty – the temporal extension of God's beautiful Being. Hence, God *ad extra* constitutes Edwards' synoptic view of reality. It appears that Edwards' interests in the connection between God and beauty were chiefly ontological and did not merely arise from an effort to fortify his epistemological system of spiritual perception. Indeed, in his system the epistemological rests upon an ontological foundation, God.

Though at times Edwards' rhetoric pushes him to the brink of pantheism, the content of his thought does not commit him: he is moving more toward a panentheistic expression of the existence of the world to God and God to the world. However, by doing so he simply means to underscore the ontological superiority, immensity, and distinction which God possesses when compared to His intelligent creatures and, to the best of his ability, to articulate the dynamic vision of the 'new spiritual sense'.

Edwards also underscores the priority of the spiritual. What is spiritual or mental is ultimately real. His idea of identifying God's excellence with the beauty of relational existence constitutes a further attempt to not only verbalize the epistemic content of his 'new spiritual sense', but also a conscious effort to recover from the materialists and deists a Christianized ontology consonant with authentic, that is to say, confessional Christian doctrine. For Edwards and his theological tradition, authentic Christian doctrine fundamentally requires the immanent presence of God in the world. The 'new spiritual sense' allows Edwards to take this fundamental doctrine one step further to make it experiential and apologetical. For the spiritually acute, human experience in this world becomes an engageable index of reality: a reality that affirms God's presence and the verity of Scripture.<sup>190</sup>

Though Edwards evidences a penchant for new considerations and speculative theologizing, yet he no way intends to depart from the theological communiqués of his tradition. He merely

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<sup>189</sup> Cf. Morris, *The Young Jonathan Edwards*, 574; Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 74.

<sup>190</sup> Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 58-59.



sought to describe the world in a manner more in tune with the spiritual reality—God’s reality—in which the world gained its existence and beauty.

So, in accord with the general spirit of the *Westminster Confession*, but keenly aware of the epistemological and ontological innovations emerging from Enlightenment thinkers, Edwards restates how God is at the center of existence and, even more so, how regenerate persons perceive reality. The creeds did not need to change, perspectives did; but so did the way his theological tradition philosophically envisioned reality. They needed to understand the world in closer agreement with the ‘new science’, and, epistemologically, in terms that corresponded to *that* reality as perceived through the spiritual sense. Edwards shows his eagerness to supply both the concepts and terminology to achieve a systematic updating. In retrospect, his tradition never embraced the idea of doing theology in abstruse philosophical terms of ‘new simple idea’, ‘Being in general’, ‘excellency’ and ‘spiritual sensibilities’, or even in the of typological categories associated with his theology of nature.<sup>191</sup>

Nevertheless, in light of the profound epistemic chasm between the regenerate mind and the unregenerate that the spiritual sense assured, Edwards’ early efforts to represent the rationality of Christianity must be seen as an attempt to establish, in the midst of the intellectual climate in which he lived, the respectability and comparative viability of his religious tradition as a philosophy of life. Armed with not only a new perspective but also a new spiritual sense, Edwards set out on a program to reinterpret reality emphasizing God’s all-encompassing presence over-against the Enlightenment’s God-marginalizing worldview. It would be God’s excellent Being, not rationality, that would harmonize the various dimensions of reality into a unified whole.

This endeavor, which combined religious intensity with intellectual rigor, would secure Jonathan Edwards’ place in history as one of the few orthodox theologians during the Enlightenment to attempt to construct a bold and sweeping systematic and philosophically integrated response to the ‘crisis’ of European intellectuality.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 111 n.14.

<sup>192</sup> Hazard, *La Crise de la Conscience Européenne*. Indeed, that JE was one of a select few able systematians to constructively respond to the Enlightenment is reinforced by the comments of Hubert Jedin: ‘with few exceptions the systematic theology of the period [between 1648-1789] was merely heir to previous achievements. It established no contact with the intellectual movements of its time, either Christian spirituality or the Enlightenment ... A few notable exceptions were the attempts by Oratorian Malebranche ... and the search by Protestant physiotheologians to achieve a concordance with the natural sciences’ (*History of the Church*, vol. VI, ed. Hubert Jedin, xix).



## **Chapter II**

### **Formulating a Theocentric Metaphysics**

#### **1. The Foundations of a Theocentric Metaphysics**

##### **1.a. A Necessary Being**

###### **1.a.i. God as ‘Being in general’**

###### **1.a.ii. Panentheistic Implications**

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##### **1.c. The Becomingness of God through Self-enlargement**

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#### **2. The Application of Jonathan Edwards’ Dispositional Concepts**

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#### **4. Concluding Remarks**



## II

### *Formulating a Theocentric Metaphysics*

END OF CREATION. GLORY OF GOD. When God is said (Prov. 16:4) to make ‘all things for himself,’ no more is necessarily understood by it, than that he made all things for his own designs and purposes, and to put them to his own use. ’Tis as much as to say that everything that is, that comes to pass, is altogether of God’s ordering, and God has some design in it; ’tis for something that God aims at and will have obtained, that this or the other thing is or happens, whatever it be.

‘*Miscellanies*’ 581

This quote from a 1732 ‘*M*’ indicates that Edwards’ theocentrism consciously entails goal-orientation. His spiritual vision of God ‘in everything’ is not just about the immanence of God, but God’s ‘ends’ in and for everything. Although the movement of all existences, or what he called ‘the great chain of being’, is toward some ‘ultimate end’, yet this did not diminish the fact that ‘God has some design’ in each and every thing ‘that is, that comes to pass’. Which is to say, even the most mundane event or minute thing has a divine ‘end’ to it.

Theologically the same point can be made at macro and micro levels. Here, Edwards’ eschatology is not simply the culminative part of the *historia revelationis*, but a normative principle in his systematic approach to dogmatics. At the macro level, his eschatology is theological in its concern for the questions of how God is finally glorified through the created order, and how His will is fully achieved. Edwards’ eschatology is also anthropological and Christological: it moves to a satisfying answer to man’s sin for each individual and collectively. Important to our study, Edwards’ eschatology is cosmological. The study of the last things—whether at the micro level (sinners *A* and *B*) or the macro (the end of creation)—is inseparably bound up with God’s design of those things and the *telic* nature woven into them. Eschatology, then, is really the study of future teleological achievements in Christ.

In Edwards, teleology means that any and all existences act for an end. Telic propensity and orientation, however, are not the result of anything other than God’s design. As we shall see in the next chapter, even for human beings teleology does not result from human desires per se. Instead, it is ontologically determined by God’s fashioning human nature as a set of telic-oriented dispositions. For Edwards, God is no interventionist, but an orchestrationist.

Edwards is able to manage and organize his telic-cosmology by subsuming the whole discussion under the rubrics of causation and being. By delegating all causal occurrences to God’s power, he ensures that the ends of creation—in every instance—will attain in full (that is, that they will be God-glorifying and contribute to the ‘ultimate’ end of creation). Precisely *how* God does this is by creating all things to function in a lawlike way. What ensures that such and such a thing always attains to God’s desired end(s) is its dispositional constitution.



God fashions, as it were, a network of existences composed of lawlike dispositional forces, which we know as the universe.

Yet God is also *in* those things in some way, namely, in power. And if we, like Edwards, identify the ‘power’ of lawlike dispositions with God, then we can say with him that God Himself gives causal occurrence and existence to all things. God, then, designs His own causal efficacy into the very structure of existence: the power of God along with the beauty of God makes up the matrix of reality. Edwards realizes that *seeing* God merely present in everything is not enough to *effect* the ends God designed for creation – God must be the causal force behind the universe. For him, nothing else could be properly theocentric, nor satisfy his desire to offer an ‘orthodox’ Christian response to the materialists and deists.<sup>1</sup> This is how Edwards wound up using the ‘new learning’ of John Smith, Shaftesbury, Locke, More, and others, to the advantage of confessional Christianity.

So, for Edwards, lawlike dispositions account for both the effect of creation and its movement toward a unified end. His whole conversation about divine pancausality is, in essence, another way for him to articulate God’s all-encompassing being, to get at a ‘Theory of Everything.’<sup>2</sup>

Now that Edwards ‘saw’ the divine presence in the world of physical phenomena and was willing to say, like Malebranche, that God is the only true causal agent, there were several things that required explanation: for example, the status of material bodies within the matrix of divine beauty. How would he explain God’s inclusivity while conscious of the standard Newtonian conception of material bodies, which he learned at Yale College?<sup>3</sup> What role would dispositions have in the realm of physics and aetiology?

In the last chapter I suggested that Edwards’ use of dispositional concepts was prompted by his analysis of the spiritual sense, which he understood to be an ontological alteration of the soul (the infusing of a ‘new disposition’ that affected mental perceptions), along with his tracing the logic of God’s transcendent/immanent presence backwards (that God Himself must possess an excellent, beautifying disposition). Edwards, in conceiving of essential and necessary telic-oriented dispositions in the being of God (in order to explain God’s ‘comprehension’ of reality), established the groundwork for how he was to think of causality, matter, minds, and God’s triunity. Relations—the structural components of disposition—were to explain the phenomena of the world of created existences just as they explained by what

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, however, JE never comments on the nomic principle Malebranche uses in his theodicy, viz. that God always acts in the simplest way possible, that is, through lawlike general volitions.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Theory of Everything’ (TOE): ‘The current ambition of physical science to find a unitary theory comprehending in a single account all forms of matter and all the fundamental forces of nature’ – John Polkinghorne, *Science and Christian Belief*, 199.

<sup>3</sup> In *Principia Mathematica* (London, 1713), Newton explained that material bodies were masses composed of hard particles (480-86).



impulse God created the world. More than that, they were integral to his explanation of minds modeled after the Triune Godhead.

In this chapter I shall endeavor to reflect further on how Edwards' 'spiritual vision' of God reveals the Divine Being present in 'everything' in terms of knowledge, essence, and power. The understanding he receives from this vision, confirmed by the content of Scripture and mature deliberation, reveals that God's presence is all-encompassing, intentional, and fixed toward particular 'ends' and even an 'ultimate end'. The upshot of his new understanding meant that his metaphysics would need to be orientated in a way that corresponded with God's telic and cosmologic relation to reality. First, however, we shall look at how he recapitulated his 'vision' of God in his doctrine of God.

The outcome of his doctrine of God is an 'all-comprehending Being'. What Edwards means by 'comprehension', however, is something far more nuanced than the Divine Being's omniscience: it is something of a technical term that includes not just the knowledge of God, but His essence and power. Thus, for Edwards, God's comprehensiveness becomes the backdrop for metaphysical speculation, the foundation of metaphysics.

The sections that follow the discussion on God provide a series of brief explications on how Edwards attempted to explain God's metaphysical presence with 'everything'. Prof. Lee has given a great deal of attention to explaining Edwards' reconception of metaphysical reality in terms of disposition. Lee provides detailed treatments of causality, material entities, and significantly, sentient beings. My work here attempts to harmonize as well as correct some of Lee's findings on dispositions with Edwards' idealism and doctrine of 'comprehensiveness'. Harmonizing these concepts will prove necessary for discussions in Chapters III-V.

Fundamental to the discussion in Chapter III is Edwards' ontological conception of man, and its predication upon his dispositional reconception of the ontological structure of the Trinity. However, it is here, at the end of Chapter II and with the help of Lee, that I briefly present Edwards' formulary principles on the Trinity that he subsequently applies to man.

The movement of the chapter is one that attempts to show how pervasive his spiritual and then 'rational' principle of God-at-the-center affected the way he thought of 'everything' from cosmology to causality, from matter to man.

## ***1. The Foundations of a Theocentric Metaphysics***

We recall that it was the vision of God as God that sparked Edwards' reconsideration of the reality of created existences in relation to the expansive reality of God's inherent disposition to replicate Himself '*ad extra*'. The 'new spiritual sense', which conveyed a 'new' vision of God, permeated every aspect of created existence. Because God is for Edwards, 'the head of



the universal system of existence; the foundation and fountain of all being',<sup>4</sup> as well as the center and first thing perceived by his spiritual sense, we start our discussion of how he was to formulate a theocentric metaphysics with a closer examination of his conception of God.

Edwards proposes that God may be 'seen' immanently present due to His actual presence in created reality. The world is not God and God is not 'it', yet the world is an extension of divine 'excellency' or beauty and the result of His immediate power, established as an externalized matrix of God's Trinitarian excellencies. Thus, 'All things are in Him and He in all' ('M'880). And while this seems to imply panentheism, the concern at present stresses the fact that metaphysical reality for Edwards *is* the reality of God, an ideal reality, which when communicated or 'emanated' *in* other minds, constitutes the idea of created existence, and when apprehended spiritually and therefore affectionally in a union of mutual consent, manifests the primary beauty of divine excellence or, in other words, God *ad extra*.

The following subsections present an important development in Edwards' ontology as he considers God's relation to the created order and lays the foundations for his theocentric metaphysics. To understand the background of Edwards' ontology for human beings, one must begin with God.

### 1.a. *A Necessary Being*

How, then, does Edwards begin with God? His earliest and preferred form of discussion comes in slightly modified variations of the ontological argument for the existence of God.<sup>5</sup> Not unlike the arguments presented in Samuel Clarke's *Discourse* and Malebranche's *Search After Truth*, Edwards' apophatic argument appears early and frequently in his various notebooks.<sup>6</sup> It is important to remember that nearly all of his theological and philosophical notebooks were begun after his conversion and, as one of their purposes, served as repositories for some given project or projects. The 'Miscellanies' and 'The Mind' notebooks were first given to a proposed treatise entitled, 'A Rational Account of the Principles and Main Doctrines of the Christian Religion.' He intended this treatise to offer not just a systematic theology but also a demonstration of the rationality or reasonableness of Christian doctrine, even the particularism of Calvinism.<sup>7</sup> Though the 'Rational Account' project was abandoned for another by 1740, both notebooks retain his preparatory thoughts for such an undertaking. Consequently, we find in them 'rational proofs' for the existence of God, usually argued from the position of 'classical' apologetics.

But while the ontological arguments that Edwards laid to form the foundation of his aborted project of reasoned Christianity eventually failed to produce the enduring results he

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<sup>4</sup> *TV, Works*8, 551.

<sup>5</sup> Schafer, 'The Concept of Being in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards', 93.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> See *Works*6, 396-97 for an outline of the 'Rational Account'.



had initially intended, yet because these arguments were more dynamic than mere conventions of deductive apologetics they retained an enduring purpose and effect in his system. Important to Edwards in these early ‘Miscellanies’ and ‘The Mind’ entries was the rational establishment of a meta-narrative for the Christian religion and all reality, which he found in God’s program of self-glorification. Furthermore, the refinement of this meta-narrative helped him to determine which kind of theocentrism (whether a theocentrism of origins, of religion, of ends, etc.) would be the regulating factor in his philosophizing and theologizing.

The notebooks, then, were the place he harmonized the truths of the Bible, the spiritual vision of God, and those derived from scientific and philosophical discovery, whether from Newton or Locke or whomever. In them we find that God’s arbitrariness is no longer a difficulty for Edwards, as it was for the Cambridge Platonists; now the spiritually sensible Edwards appreciates its ‘fittingness’. A great number of entries are therefore given to explaining and unfolding the reasonable implications of this theocentric perspective. Thus, God is brought into time and space through His relation to created existences, causation, motion, the conservation of matter, intelligent beings, and especially redemption.

Indicative of Enlightenment concerns, the issue of causation stands prominent in many of his notebook entries. In them Edwards makes every existence an effect of God’s necessary and eternal existence.<sup>8</sup> In addition to his ‘theocentrism of origins’ (where all things originate with God), causation serves as another way to introduce divine immanence. In Edwards’ aetiology, the effect of created existence has no power within itself to sustain a continued existence. Therefore God, or at least His power, must be immediately and continuously present if there is to be a universe: He is the eternal *sine qua non* of all existence – powerfully present throughout all reality, producing the effect of existence each and every moment.

As a necessary and eternal being, which is *ens a se* and ‘the sum of all being,’ God possesses ‘absolute perfection.’<sup>9</sup> According to Edwards, this means that God is entirely prior to the created order in completeness and perfection:

[I]t is evident, by both Scripture and reason, that God is infinitely, eternally, unchangeably, and independently glorious and happy; that he stands in no need of, cannot be profited by, or receive anything from the creature [or creation]; or be truly hurt, or be the subject of any sufferings or *impair* of his glory and felicity from any other being.<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, what some brusquely call the ‘full-bucket theory’ of God is for Edwards nothing but the orthodox doctrine of divine self-sufficiency. Both the natural and moral

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<sup>8</sup> ‘M’pp and 124, *Works*13, 188, 288. Cf. Jenkins, “‘The Being of Beings’”, 161-90, esp. 174-76.

<sup>9</sup> ‘M’650, *Works*18, 190-91. Cf. Anselm’s idea of *aseitas* in *Monologion* and *Proslogion*.

<sup>10</sup> *EofC*, *Works*8, 420. Tim. 6:15 (1738): ‘DOC. God is a being possessed of the most absolutely perfect happiness.’ JE quotes from Andrew Baxter to say that ‘God is ... *vitae interminabilis* ...’ (Baxter, *An Enquirey into the Nature of the Human Soul*, 2:409f.



attributes of God are eternally perfect, unchangeable, and necessary.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, Edwards defines God's eternity in the familiar language of classic orthodox theology: '[T]he eternity of God's existence ... is nothing else but his immediate, perfect and invariable possession of the whole of his unlimited life, together and at once; *vitae interminabilis, tota, simul et perfecta possessio*.'<sup>12</sup> This, Edwards says, is 'so generally allowed,' that he 'need not stand to demonstrate it.' Theological meliorism, 'open theism,' and 'new model' proposals of select contemporary theologians, which advance notions of the passibility and/or 'openness' of God,<sup>13</sup> are utterly foreign to his understanding of a plausible, that is to say, biblical theological paradigm: 'The notion of God's creating the world in order to receive anything properly from the creature [or creation] is not only contrary to the nature of God, but inconsistent with the notion of creation.' He reasons that a created order implies a being or entity receiving its existence, 'and all that belongs to its being,' *ex nihilo*, 'and this implies the most perfect, absolute and universal derivation and dependence.'<sup>14</sup> Therefore, '[T]he being and excellence of the creatures is not something added to that of the creator but all the being and excellence that is in them is comprehended in His being and excellence for they are but communications from Him.'<sup>15</sup> For in God there exists an infinite *fullness*, 'a *fullness* of every perfection, of all excellency and beauty, and of happiness.'<sup>16</sup> In Edwards' way of thinking, any investigation into the foundations of cosmology, teleology, aetiology, or timology, ultimately terminate in ontological considerations of God. God's existence provides the unity and harmony of 'being,' upon which Edwards grounds his analogies and argues for 'evidences of harmony in nature.'<sup>17</sup> Such is the scope of Edwards' theocentric reasoning.

### 1.a.i. God as 'Being in general'

The idea of God's necessary existence and immanent power/presence gains philosophical sophistication when Edwards, like Malebranche, identifies God with the metaphysical

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<sup>11</sup> Num. 23:19 (1729): 'God is Immutable ... an unchanging being.'

<sup>12</sup> *Works1*, 385-86.

<sup>13</sup> Theological meliorism is the belief that God is omnibenevolent but not omnipotent. Humanity, in this case, must work together with the forces of God in creating a universe with less evil and more good. 'New Model' theology (sometimes called 'open-view theism', 'openness theism', 'presentism', and often 'free-will theism') purports that God neither knows nor controls (i.e. eternally predestines, immutably decrees or sovereignly influences) all things that happen or will happen. Rather, man dialectically or synergistically participates in a relational experience with God to bring the future into being (see Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism*; Sanders, *The God Who Risks*; Boyd, *The God of the Possible*; for opposing views, Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*; and Wright, *No Place for Sovereignty*).

<sup>14</sup> *EofC*, *Works8*, 420. Cf. 'M'679, *Works18*, 237-39.

<sup>15</sup> Rom. 1:20 (1743): 'DOC. The being and attributes of God are clearly to be seen by the works of creation' (1). Cf. 'M'448, *Works13*, 495-96.

<sup>16</sup> *EofC*, *Works8*, 432-33. 'I shall often use the phrase "God's FULLNESS," as signifying and comprehending all the good which is in God natural and moral, either excellence or happiness' (434-35 n.7). 'Excellence' and 'happiness' are two main qualities of the moral good that is in God. 'Wisdom' belongs with 'power' in JE's designations of the natural good in God.

<sup>17</sup> 'M'1263, *PJE*, 193.



referent, 'Being in general'.<sup>18</sup> God as 'Being in general' emerges as a key metaphysical concept through which the created order is understood with relation to God's extension. God is the immediate apprehension of being, as well as the power and essence of being. Generated existences are, then, an extension of participation in Being. In Edwards, participation in God and participation in being or existence come to the same thing.<sup>19</sup>

If 'Being in general' is thus understood, it would be easy to conclude a diminution of existence and value the further created entities were from the 'source' of being, just as Schafer indicates.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Edwards seems to indicate this with his ostensibly Neoplatonic system of 'scales or series of created existences.'<sup>21</sup> But the 'great chain' or 'scale' is only *descriptively* Neoplatonic.<sup>22</sup> Substantiality (mental realness) and value of being are not measured in terms of proximity to the 'source of being', but according to degrees of excellency and perfection. Even when Edwards employs his emanationistic phraseology (e.g. 'emanate', 'diffuse'), 'being in general' should not be construed as a kind of gray scale, for it has structure.<sup>23</sup> Without structure, in terms of a variety of distinguishable existences with qualitative and even quantitative differentiations, Edwards would, of course, run the risk of pantheism. But qualifiers are present. The design evident in the structure of being and the laws that govern it is nothing less than the *analogia entis* among all the orders of creation.<sup>24</sup>

However, the main thrust of Edwards' referent 'Being in general' lies in another direction. It refers not merely to God plus the 'sum' of particular beings at a given time, but also the *power* of being in 'whatsoever may be said to exist' (Schafer). For this reason

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<sup>18</sup> Malebranche's and JE's ontological arguments for the existence of God, inasmuch as they start with the conception of being itself, may be seen, therefore, to differ from Anselm's origin of the idea of God as the most perfect or greatest conceivable being. (Note also that JE takes 'being' itself as the most abstract of our ideas [cf. 'The Mind' 7, *Works6*, 340].) 'The Mind' 1 and 45 make explicit the synonymous identification between 'God' and 'Being in general': 'When we speak of being in general, we may be understood [to speak] of the divine Being, for he is an infinite being' (*Works6*, 332-38, 362-64). By 'being in general', Fiering explains, JE means 'the transcendent God *plus* His ordered creation' (*Moral Thought*, 326). That is, when JE intends 'being' to have ontological significance 'being in general' is its prime signification, equivalent to 'being as such,' being *qua* being. Cf. Malebranche, *Recherche de la Vérité*, III.2.8. *Search after Truth* is entered as read on p. 3 of JE's 'Catalogue'. For an analysis of Malebranche's ontology see Walton, 'Malebranche's Ontology', 143-61; and Bremond, 'Le theocentrisme de Malebranche', 281-303.

<sup>19</sup> 'Natural Philosophy', *Works6*, 238.

<sup>20</sup> 'The Concept of Being', 95f.

<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere: 'great chain'. Elwood denies a 'chain' or 'scale of being' in JE's thought (*PTJE*, 28). But see, 'M'tt, 1263, Ezek. 15:2-4 (1744), and *Works8*, 546 n.6, to the contrary.

<sup>22</sup> Hence Holbrook's statement that JE owns a 'Neoplatonic vision of reality' ('EI', *Works3*, 42).

<sup>23</sup> In *Works8*, 433 n. 5, Paul Ramsey raises the question of how JE's use of 'emanation' or 'diffusion' should be understood—whether as Neoplatonic or not? He explains that JE's usage of imagery, such as the sun or fountain (*EofC*, 433), is always employed in the context of communication. Furthermore, such images were intended to be *biblical* illustrations, not Neoplatonic. Thus, JE's meaning of communication governs the use and meaning of emanation and diffusion. JE's unusually circumspect language in the employment of images typically employs verbal qualifiers, such as: 'in effect' and 'as it were'. Ramsey's conclusion is supported by Claghorn's evaluation of JE's use of 'emanation' in 'The Mind' 45 (see *Works16*, 632). Likewise, Holmes' Trinitarian account of JE's doctrine of creation renders a Neoplatonic reading of JE implausible (*God of Grace*, 44-59).

<sup>24</sup> Schafer, 'The Concept of Being', 96-97. *M'651*, *Works18*, 191-92.



Edwards designates God '*Ens Entium*' ('the Being of beings'), and concludes that God 'is the sum of all being and there is no being without his being.'<sup>25</sup> The theoretical alternative to God as 'real existence', says Edwards, is 'absolute nothing', which he claims to have shown is 'the essence of all contradictions.'<sup>26</sup>

If 'God is being' is a strict metaphysical identification, then God is the totality of all manifestations of existence, and all entities are *encompassed* by Him as aspects of a matrix (or as Schafer says, 'parts to a whole'). The matrix itself may therefore be identified with the beautiful being of God. 'Being in general', then, possesses the capacity and efficacy of promoting 'excellence,' which when translated into ontological terms is mental existence, or in relational terms, 'love' or 'consent to being'.<sup>27</sup>

With the idea of 'Being in general', Edwards ontologically links all existences to that one necessary and, as it were, all-encompassing existence, God. He does so not only through the aesthetic and relational feature of *excellency*, but also power – the activity or promotion of being. Together 'excellency' and 'power' comprise the structure of existence.

In short, sharing in the 'excellency' or beauty of God is the same thing as sharing in existence itself—'Being in general'. To put it differently, existence for created entities consists of existing as an instance of divine 'excellency' or, as Edwards states it, 'being-as-manifest'. Thus, 'Being in general' and the matrix of divine beauty (or 'being-as-manifest') are in essence the same thing. The power of being that effects ontological instances of 'excellency' is the power or being of God.<sup>28</sup>

Edwards now possesses a conceptual metaphysical foundation by which he may begin to explain God's 'comprehensive' (or panentheistic) relation to everything.

### 1.a.ii. *Panentheistic Implications*

Here we must comment whether Edwards is pantheistic or panentheistic or simply employing a rhetoric that suggests pantheism or panentheism, but really intends to prioritize God's being and indicate distinction (a contingent inclusion) between the Creator and the creation.

Before we consider these options we shall deal with the misnomer that Edwards' comments on these topics within 'The Mind' and 'Miscellanies' notebooks were merely *private* speculations on difficult and mysterious matters. One might contend that, if such statements were confidential ruminations, then we must not scrutinize over these private documents, which receive later (and presumably more orthodox) refinements for publication. But two things mitigate against this. First, as Thomas Schafer and Ava Chamberlain have

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<sup>25</sup> Though, in one place, JE says that God is '*Ens Entium*' with respect to bodies (*Works6*, 238), yet his application of God's all-encompassing being extends to all existences. For instance, in 'The Mind' he says, 'God and real existence are the same' (345).

<sup>26</sup> 'M'27a. *Works13*, 213. Cf. 'Natural Philosophy' No. 44, *Works6*, 238.

<sup>27</sup> 'The Mind' 1 and 45, *Works6*, 334-36, 362-66.

<sup>28</sup> 'The Mind' 29 and 34, *Works6*, 352, 353.



shown, the ‘Miscellanies’ were *semi*-private notebooks, which Edwards envisioned as publishable material.<sup>29</sup> He also used them in a tutorial capacity and allowed ministerial candidates under his tutelage, along with others, to freely engage them. Secondly, some of his published works, such as *Two Dissertations*, repeat verbatim the content under question. *End of Creation*, for example, records a statement from ‘The Mind’ that, ‘[God] comprehends all entity, and all excellence is His own essence. The first Being, the eternal and infinite Being, is in effect, *Being in general*; and comprehends universal existence’; or, again, from the ‘Miscellanies’: ‘God [is] seeking Himself in the creation of the world.’<sup>30</sup>

Not only were such statements semi-private but they appear throughout his corpus. The consistency and permanence of his thought on God and His relation to created existences is evident in examples from 1723, where we find him writing, ‘God and real existence are the same’; and twenty years later in ‘M’880, ‘God is the sum of all being and there is not being without His being’;<sup>31</sup> and just two years before his death, ‘God [is] in effect, universal, all-comprehending being.’<sup>32</sup> Such statements, then, reflect his enduring thought on the matter.

Some commentators find these statements indicative of pantheism.<sup>33</sup> Another scholar, Arthur B. Crabtree, tells of two distinct streams of thought in Edwards, one that is ‘pure pantheism’, the other an ‘Augustinian-Calvinistic concept of God’.<sup>34</sup> According to Crabtree, each is a self-contained doctrine employed by Edwards at different times (but never together) for different purposes. Douglas Elwood, however, does not see Edwards expressing pantheistic statements but panentheistic descriptions, such as: ‘All things are in Him and He in all’ (‘M’880). Despite Robert Whitemore’s rejoinder, Elwood’s suggestion of Edwardsean panentheism stands correct based on manuscript evidence, though Edwards is not the proto-Hartsthornean process theologian that Elwood would have him to be.<sup>35</sup>

If pantheism, as a general rule, holds that God is *identical* with everything, and that, generally speaking, panentheism is the view that God is *in* all things, or all things are in God, then Edwards clearly belongs to the latter category.<sup>36</sup> His idealist vision of reality as a matrix of divine beauty/excellency (= the ontological) and power (= the aetiological) clearly evinces traits of panentheism. God is in all things, for it is His excellency that constitutes the being of

<sup>29</sup> See Schafer, ‘EI’, *Works*13, 7-10, 545-46; and, Chamberlain, ‘EI’, *Works*18, 8-10.

<sup>30</sup> *Works*8, 452, 461. *EofC* incorporates whole or parts of at least fifteen ‘Miscellanies’ entries.

<sup>31</sup> TS Beinecke.

<sup>32</sup> ‘The Mind’ 15, *Works*6, 345; *PJE*, 87; *EofC*, *Works*8, 456.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Hornberger, ‘The Effect of the New Science upon the Thought of Jonathan Edwards’, 198; and, Rem B. Edwards, *A Return to Moral and Religious Philosophy in Early America*, 65.

<sup>34</sup> *Jonathan Edwards’ View of Man*, 17, 18.

<sup>35</sup> For a brief discussion on the differences between JE and process theology, see Appendix A: ‘Panentheistic, but not Process Thought’. Elwood, *PTJE*, 22-29, 53; Whitemore, ‘Jonathan Edwards and the Theology of the Sixth Way’, 60f.

<sup>36</sup> These definitions correspond to *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Robert Audi (Gen. Ed.).



any and all existence, and it is His power which instantiates and maintains all existence. Additionally, Edwards articulates an accompanying proposition: ‘all [things] are in God.’<sup>37</sup>

However, when he makes *pantheistic* statements like, ‘To be is to be all, and it would be a contradiction to suppose two alls’,<sup>38</sup> he does not mean that God is identical or identified by all. Instead, he means that God panentheistically *comprehends* all. For Edwards, this term ‘comprehend’ and its forms are technically employed in his attempt to explain God’s unique and necessary being. He understands God as a necessary being in three ways: in terms of necessary existence, necessary consciousness, and necessary power. These three, which embody the foundational suppositions of his ontology, idealism, and aetiology, are conveniently encased in one term, ‘comprehension’. Consider its usage in *Two Dissertations*:

God ... comprehends all entity, and all excellence in his own existence. The first Being, the eternal and infinite Being, is in effect, *Being in general*; and comprehends universal existence....

God is not only infinitely greater and more excellent than all other being but he is the head of the universal system of existence; the foundation and fountain of all being and all beauty ... *of whom*, and *through whom*, and *to whom* is all being and all perfection; and whose being and beauty is as it were the sum and comprehension of all existence and excellence.<sup>39</sup>

In these excerpts ‘comprehend’ not only means God possesses infinite knowledge and understanding, but that His being actually encompasses all existence. So where some use the term to mean either (a) to grasp mentally or (b) to include, or embrace, Edwards means both and with ontological implications. God is not in a mode of acquisition concerning either (a) or (b), since His knowledge and being are prior and immutable aspects of His essence. Instead, God’s infinite ‘knowledge and essence’ are what constitute existence itself: hence the declaration, ‘God is the sum of all being and there is no being without his being. All things are in Him, and He in all’ (‘M’880).

His doctrine of omnipresence, then, is really more a doctrine of omniscience-cum-omnipotence. Edwards explains in his MS sermon on the biblical *locus classicus* for omnipresence, Ps. 139:7-10 (1727), that other things do not exclude God by being in the same place at the same time as His ‘essence’; rather, ‘God is there where other things are not only round about ’em but *in* ’em. We are in God ... and God is in us and in every part of us.’ He continues, however, by insisting that God does not have parts:

We must take heed that we han’t too gross a notion of God’s immensity and omnipresence. We must not conceive of it as if part were in no place and part in another ... for God is not made up of parts, for He is a simple pure act. It is not part of God that is in us but God is in us.

His denial of divine ‘parts’ is significant in that it separates his understanding from monistic pantheism or a numeric identification of God and the universe. Consequently, when Schafer

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<sup>37</sup> ‘M’91, 139, *Works*13, 254-56, 295.

<sup>38</sup> ‘M’697, *Works*18, 281.

<sup>39</sup> *EofC*, *Works*8, 461; *TV*, 551.



concludes that all entities are related to God ‘as parts to a whole’ or, as I say, ‘aspects of a matrix’, we are not rendering void Edwards’ claim to the *deus simplicitum* principle. Edwards makes this clear as he explains how God should be conceived: not in terms of extended spatial immensity (with  $x$  or  $\sim$  number of parts), but in terms of comprehension of knowledge and power:

God is neither little nor great with that sort of greatness, even as the soul of man; it is not at all extended, *no more than an idea*, and is not present anywhere as bodies are present....<sup>40</sup>

Greatness of being, he insists, lies in its comprehensiveness of *idea* and extendedness of operation: ‘So the infiniteness of God consists in His perfect comprehension of all things and the extendedness of his operations equally to all places.’ Hence, God’s essence is conceived as perfect idea (the Son) and *actus purus* (the Spirit). God, then, is understood as a Trinity of ‘omnipotence, perfect knowledge and perfect love;’ and not extended any otherwise than panentheistically, as power, knowledge and love are extended, ‘and not as if it was a sort of unknown thing that we call substance, that is extended.’<sup>41</sup>

The *unity of the Godhead* follows from God’s being infinite in terms of comprehension.<sup>42</sup> Being itself, however, does not consist of parts, but rather divine proportion, power, and knowledge: hence, God’s unity, infinity, and omnipresence. And while God comprehends the entity of all His creatures, yet their entity or existence does not add to His (as if they were not comprehended by it), for they are ‘but communications from Him ... Communications of being ben’t additions of being.’<sup>43</sup> God, therefore, is relationally immutable.

So far from making God identical with everything, Edwards in his rhetoric consciously intends to underscore the distinction between God and the world. McClymond states it well: ‘Edwards’ identification of God as “Being in general” is designed chiefly to highlight the utter uniqueness and incommensurability of God. Precisely because of God’s own infinite Being, God transcends creatures that exist only in partial and particular ways.’<sup>44</sup> But his rhetoric also is intentionally panentheistic in that he makes the transcendent yet personal God of Christian theism, encompass all existence and all existence abide in and as His excellence and power.<sup>45</sup> Though his language frequently tends to pantheism, yet the intent and full scope

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<sup>40</sup> ‘M’194, *Works*13, 334-35. Emphasis mine.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 335. The reference here is to material substances as such, as well as the unknown substance of Newton and Locke.

<sup>42</sup> ‘M’697, *Works*18, 281-82.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> *Encounters*, 31. Pantheism may be contrasted with JE on this point: where pantheism either mutes or rejects the transcendence of God in favor of radical immanence, JE extols transcendence. He also brings God’s transcendence into this realm through his spiritual vision of ‘God as God’.

<sup>45</sup> It is within the discussion in which he states, ‘Existence or entity is that into which all excellency is to be reduced’, that JE says that the ‘Divine Being ... is the infinite, universal and all comprehensive existence’ (‘The Mind’ 62, *Works*6, 381).



of his thought lead to a panentheistic scheme. God's perfections, whether conceived theologically or metaphysically, include the essential idea of those perfections *ad extra*.

### 1.a.iii. *God and the 'Scale of Being'*

If 'Being in general' includes 'the scale of being', then 'being-as-manifest' and the matrix of divine beauty come to the same thing. All the orders of creation—the 'scale'—give the matrix a hierarchical connotation. This hierarchy is, as it were, the 'physical' superstructure of the ontological matrix of divine beauty. The infrastructure consists of relations. But none of this is for no reason: in possession of a panentheistic explanation of the ontological relation between God and the world, Edwards gives considerable attention to *why* things are such. Theology merges with metaphysics, as Edwards allows the Biblical narrative of redemption and, in particular, its eschatological themes to transform an Aristotelian-Thomistic 'metaphysics of finality' into a Christian 'theocentrism of ends'. Consequently, in Edwards' thought, we find that the argument from telic causes is interwoven with that from design, for he cannot think of structure or design apart from its use concomitant to its ends.<sup>46</sup> So far from being static, the 'great chain of being' is *telic-oriented* and, consequently, progressing toward an ultimate integrated 'end', namely, the consummate glorification of God's beautiful being.

There are three general divisions to Edwards' scale of being: God, finite spirits, and the material world.<sup>47</sup> Each level of being is linked to the other through (1) an aesthetically determined factor – *relations*, and (2) divinely prescribed *telic-orientation*. The whole matrix of reality may then be thought of as a network of interconnected relations moving toward a determined telos. As such, Edwards metaphysically guarantees the consummate achievement of God's program, since the matrix of reality is bound up with the Divine Being, who infallibly obtains His 'ends'. Ontological and aetiological determinism become united functions in Edwards' philosophical-theology: the existence and movement of the world is understood as the manifest being and activity of God.

God is also the 'greatest of all beings' and has the most rarefied and extensive relations, while non-sentient entities have the least. Edwards is always careful to treat God specially, so with reference to the 'great chain' he considers God ontologically prior and supreme, for God internally possesses perfect innertrinitarian relations and, externally, the most extensive (all) and substantial relations (which for Edwards is but one relation) for the sole reason that all things are related to God as His own self-extension/replication.<sup>48</sup> God, therefore, may be

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<sup>46</sup> Schafer, 'The Concept of Being', 96. Cf. 'M' 274, 651 and 880 to this end.

<sup>47</sup> Finite spirits would include angelic beings of all types, but usually refers to human spirits. Animals, as non-self-conscious entities, are ultimately relegated to the material world. See n. 104 in Chapter I.

<sup>48</sup> Through his use of 'proportionality' or the *analogia relationis* JE shows ontological similarities with Thomas Aquinas. See Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 325ff, and Jenkins, "'The Being of Beings'", 175-77. See also Lisska's analysis of Aquinian '*adequatio*' and its relation to the aesthetic qualifier 'proportion, with respect to ontology in *Aquinas' Theory of Natural Law*.



considered relationally immutable because He is ever only related to Himself, even through the manifest extension or replication of Himself. The ontological priority Edwards ascribes to God not only differentiates God from created existences, but also serves to explain the inclusiveness of God with respect to the creation.

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In the wake of his conversion well into his years of mature theological reflection Edwards presented in sometimes unoriginal material all of the classic incommunicable attributes of God (e.g. aseity, immutability, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence) with certain and ‘necessary’ proximity to his fundamental arguments for God’s being. The distant goal may have been to set forth a ‘Rational Account’ of Christian doctrine, but at first there was the need to ground all existence in the being of God Himself in order to legitimize metaphysically the theocentric, spiritual vision of God’s presence ‘in everything’. In Edwards’ mind, God as ‘Being in general’ accomplished just that.

His ‘rational proofs’ were not merely concerned with the *idea* of God but His *reality* and, in connection with the divine purposes in redemption, His perfections and personality.

Considered solely as arguments for the existence of God, his material on design and disposal is frequently circular and ineffective, especially in light of Hume’s criticisms.<sup>49</sup> Still, the conception which emerges is of ‘a necessary being’ and ‘Being in general’; God is one, infinitely full, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and dwelling in aeviternity;<sup>50</sup> He also is spirit and a perfect mind. In a word, next to Edwards’ ‘scale of existence according to excellence and perfection,’ God is ‘infinitely the greatest and most excellent being ... the sum of all being.’<sup>51</sup> God’s being transcends the scale and, yet, encompasses it.

Edwards’ panentheistic expressions hint at other ontological peculiarities in God, beyond all-comprehensiveness. For instance, he intimates that the created order is really the *temporal extension* of God, which implies divine potentiality. Any question concerning potentiality or temporality and God’s timeless eternity and immutability, however, find their answers in

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<sup>49</sup> Conscious of the inadequacy of his cosmological arguments (*Works*6, 339-40), JE was to learn that mere rational argumentation for the proof of the deity only treated God according to the criteria of Enlightenment rationalists; thus neglecting the immediate intuition of spiritual perception/sensibilities. Furthermore, the principle that the cause must be equal to the effect can, by itself, lead only to a linear infinite succession of contingent existences. Schafer argues that, whether JE was conscious of this latter difficulty or not, he constantly tended to base his argument, in the last analysis, ‘upon the immediate leap from the contingent character of all beings to the necessity of being in general’ (‘The Concept of Being’, 135). His ontological work reflects this certainty of the ontological necessity of ‘Being in general’, by moving from necessary being to the contingent creature, from the self-existent to derived being. Outside of his ruminations in idealism and teleology, JE does little to fill in the gap between necessary and contingent existence. Consequently, we find him one moment speaking with panentheistic intentions and in the next moment explaining ‘being’ in terms of a Neoplatonic hierarchical ‘chain’, which would agree better with a pantheistic scheme.

<sup>50</sup> Aeviternity – the name for eternity as an infinite past and future totality. Used in the context of transcending time and change.

<sup>51</sup> *M*1077, *PJE*, 184.



the larger questions of ‘*Why* God’s being must be spatiotemporally present?’ and ‘What is it *in* God’s being that could make it such?’ It is to these questions that we now turn.

### 1.b. *God’s End in Creation*

In order to ascertain the answers to these questions, we must know more precisely what God’s program of self-glorification is according to Edwards. For what this program entails carries with it an explanation of God’s telic purposes in creation and how those purposes are effected.

Although mentioned in the ‘Miscellanies’ as early as 1723, Edwards’ most complete synopsis of this topic finds expression in a treatise composed in 1756-57, entitled, *Concerning the End for which God Created the World*. Written as a complex response to New England’s increasingly rationalistic/moralistic tendencies, as well as deism and the fashionable ‘sentimentalist’ philosophical schools, *End of Creation* coupled with *The Nature of True Virtue* comprise the posthumously published *Two Dissertations* (1765). Read as a single tome, these treatises argue, among other things, that the love of God is the necessary context for all truly moral actions, and that morality finds its apposite and exclusive fulfillment in authentic religion (i.e. Spirit generated Christianity).<sup>52</sup> Important to our discussion, it provides Edwards’ most sustained treatment of God’s creative activities.

Its opening chapter is suitably titled, ‘What Reason Teaches Concerning This Affair’. The apologetical premise of this chapter assumes that both divine and human agencies are necessarily *telic* or goal-oriented beings. But what Edwards requires as a necessary and defining element of intelligent and voluntary beings, namely, a telic propensity, proves to be a dispositional element in his ontology. Upon a supposition of the logic of disposition he then forges a philosophical and apologetical argument for God’s ‘ultimate end’ in creation.

Significantly, his assumed telic-oriented dispositional principle establishes the distinction between ‘ultimate’ and ‘subordinate’ ends. In *End of Creation*, Edwards, as a self-appointed defender of orthodox Protestantism, must have a way of affirming that God’s ‘ultimate end’ (an end sought for its own sake as opposed to a ‘subordinate end’, i.e. one sought for the sake of another end) in creating *is* God’s own self, without reverting to pure philosophical ratiocination which would have appeared less biblical (he leaves most of that for the second dissertation). Therefore he sets upon this task in the first section of chapter one by insisting that God creates the world out of an inherent ‘glorious’ self-regard, that is, out of a ‘disposition in his fullness’ to regard Himself ‘supremely above all things.’ When asked ‘Why?’ Edwards gives the reason, because it seems ‘a thing in itself fit, proper and desirable’

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<sup>52</sup> See McClymond’s excellent analysis of *Two Dissertations* in *Encounters*, c. 4, and Ramsey, ‘EI’, *Works*8, 12-49. The eminent Puritan divine John Owen (whose treatises on the Holy Spirit and discerning God’s will JE read, recorded in his ‘Catalogue’, and cited with approval in *RA* [*Works*2, 250-51 n., 372-73 n.]), also distinguished between common morality and true religion. Inasmuch as JE supported and fortified this distinction, he may be seen as one continuing a thought already present within orthodox Calvinism.



that God, in acting, has highest regard for what is most worthy ('valuable') and honorable, namely, His own being ('fullness' or 'perfections'), attributes, and nature.<sup>53</sup>

God's 'fullness', however, 'is capable of communication or emanation *ad extra*.'<sup>54</sup> This is because it contains a 'disposition to communicate himself or diffuse his own *fullness*', which Edwards insists 'must be conceived of as being originally in God as a perfection of his nature'.<sup>55</sup> It follows that God not only has a regard for His perfections, attributes and nature—a nature or metadisposition that possesses or consists of essential dispositions toward certain exercises, like '*diffusing his own infinite fullness*'—but also a 'delight in their proper exercise and expression.'<sup>56</sup>

Thus Edwards contends that it is not 'fit' or reasonable that God's internal fullness should lack any external manifestation or exercise *and*, pressing the point, he suggests that each divine attribute be interpreted as 'a sufficiency to certain acts and effects' or a capacity for producing 'correspondent effects.' God not only sees it a thing that is 'fit' and 'excellent' (thereby giving sufficient reason to the exercise of this disposition), but there is even a kind of ontological inevitability that He must exercise those dispositions necessary to His nature and essence *to* a particular corresponding effect.

What, then, is God's program of self-glorification? It is the inevitable exercising of the goal-oriented disposition(s) in God 'capable of communication or emanation *ad extra*', to the end that 'there might be a glorious and abundant emanation of his infinite fullness of good *ad extra*, or without himself, and the disposition to communicate himself or diffuse his own *fullness*, which we must conceive of as being originally in God as a perfection of his nature'.<sup>57</sup> This entails a program by which all the internal perfections of God, all His fullness, and the glorious relational aspects of the Trinity, could achieve optimum glorification and presentation in a dimension not *ad intra* to God, but *ad extra*. In God, Edwards explains, 'there is an infinite fullness of all possible good ... a fullness of every perfection, of all excellency and beauty, and of infinite happiness.'<sup>58</sup> Happiness, as we took note of earlier, ultimately consists

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<sup>53</sup> Normative terms such as 'fit', 'proper', 'amiable', serve as verbal signals that JE is speaking from an aesthetic frame of reference. These indicators are often linked to providing a rational, or at least, cogent explanation of divine arbitrariness. See Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility* for this aspect of JE's thought.

<sup>54</sup> *Works*8, 433.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 433-34.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 435. Cf. JE's statement: '*For the same reason that he esteems his own sufficiency wisely to contrive and dispose effects, he also will esteem the wise contrivance and disposition itself*' (430). God's 'metadisposition' (my term, not JE's) is toward Himself supremely. If we may speak thus, then there are, as it were, other dispositions within God subordinate to His 'metadisposition'. One such disposition is toward God exercising Himself '*ad extra*'.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 433-34. Another way (other than by philosophical-theology) that JE approaches this matter of divine fullness is to explicate it through biblical exegesis. See, for example, 'Scripture' No. 235, *Works*15, 185. Additionally, c. 2 of *EofC* is devoted to 'What is to be Learned from Holy Scriptures Concerning God's Last End in the Creation of the World.' In it JE essentially recasts the apologetical nature of chapter one in biblical phraseology, suppling 'proof' texts, and extracting the doctrine from Paul's usage of '*πλεωμα*' ('fullness') (*Works*8, 434 n. 7).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 435.



in mutual consenting relations. Such relations are considered ‘excellent’ and therefore promotional of being. In Edwards’ way of thinking, for God to be perfectly excellent, as well as *Ens Entium*, He must be perfectly related to Himself ‘outside’ of Himself or, (which is the same thing) to Himself through another excellent relation. That other excellent relation is the ‘fruit’ of the exercise of the divine diffusive disposition: ‘The excellency of God’s nature ...

appears in that, that he loves and seeks whatever is in itself excellent. One way that the excellency of God’s nature appears is in loving himself, or loving his own excellency and infinite perfection; and as he loves his own perfection, so he loves the effulgence or shining forth of that perfection, or loves his own excellency in the expression and fruit of it. ’Tis an excellent thing that that which is excellent should be expressed in proper *act* and *fruit*.<sup>59</sup>

Quite simply the ‘*act*’ is the exercising of that necessary and essential disposition in God to externalize His excellent fullness; the ‘*fruit*’ is that fullness externally manifested.

However, it is not enough for the divine fullness to be manifested, that manifestation must be perceived, known, and appreciated by *other* consciousnesses.<sup>60</sup> Here, again, Edwards’ idealism resurfaces to simplify matters through the maxim: whatever is not present to perceiving consciousness is as good as non-existent. So he says of God’s self-communication, ‘if the expressions of his attributes be not known, they are not; the very being of the *expression* depends on the perception of created understandings.’<sup>61</sup> Certainly God knows these expressions, but Edwards’ burden lies in the point that *they are expressions*. For the fullness of God (God’s idea of Himself) to be an ‘*ad extra*’ expression it must resonate *in* other intelligent consciousnesses – consciousnesses that are, of course, unified in terms of cognition and inclination, understanding and affections.<sup>62</sup> Hence the ethical dimension to his idealist position and the crux of his theory of virtue ethics: God must not only be known as a beautiful spiritual reality by perceiving being, but He must receive consent. (Here Edwards’ Trinitarian framework stands out: knowledge of the idea = the Son; matching affections = the Spirit.)

The circuit is now complete. God’s fullness is not only capable of communicating itself *ad extra*, but also capable of replicating an excellent relation (a mental likeness) to affectionally perceive His fullness as external. Such relations are consenting instances of excellency which, in turn, facilitate ‘being-as-manifest’ or ‘Being in general’ *ad extra*. The whole process may be seen as a kind of idealistic occasionalism.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> ‘M’699, *Works*18, 282. Italics added.

<sup>60</sup> *EofC*, *Works*8, 430-32.

<sup>61</sup> ‘M’662, *Works*18, 200. Emphasis mine.

<sup>62</sup> It would follow upon the logic of this reasoning that *IPBs* are themselves manifestations of the divine fullness and not just perceivers. In Chapter III I give attention to JE’s explanation of how an *IPB*’s self-consciousness is the perception of themselves and, ultimately, of God’s manifested fullness. How this relates to the natural-man and reprobate stands obvious.

<sup>63</sup> For a definition of occasionalism and Jonathan Edwards’s unique idealistic occasionalism *v.i.* §§2.a and 2.c.



### 1.b.i. *Redemption: The Means to God's 'Ultimate End'*

According to Edwards, God's mechanism for achieving total self-glorification through self-communication is the work of redemption. God's self-communication consists of replicating or externalizing the Divine Being's internal perfections, which, according to Stephen Holmes' insightful analysis, consist 'only and precisely in the Son and the Spirit.'<sup>64</sup> How then does the Father conceive of Himself? His 'perfect' image of Himself consists of dialectical redemptive concepts of God crucified and God resurrection, God glorification in weakness and God vindication in judgment: in a word, the Son – but affectionally so, therefore, the Son *and* the Spirit.<sup>65</sup> Thus, for Edwards, only through the work of redemption could those divine attributes (subsumed under the Divine perfections, Son and Spirit) that pertain to the personal and relational dimensions of God's nature—love, mercy, justness, graciousness, generosity, friendliness, willingness to forgive, even anger and wrath—be adequately communicated and glorified.

Consequently all things—whether works of creation or providence—are subordinate to the work of redemption:<sup>66</sup> for this work (and program) is 'but one work of God' with one supreme end. In Edwards' words, "'Tis all one scheme, one contrivance; and one that is the scheme, contrivance and work of glorifying himself and his Son Jesus Christ'.<sup>67</sup>

Redemption is not only intrinsic to the creation of this world, it seems it would have been the impetus for the creation or existence of any and all other possible worlds. Since, for Edwards, this one work of redemption is such that constitutes the sum total of the idea of God's program for self-glorification, and since even notions of creation and providence are subordinate to it, he concludes that redemption functions as the interpretive factor for all meaning and existence.<sup>68</sup> Everything—all existence, all occurrences, whatever may be said to have been, is, or will be—is connected to God's program to glorify Himself through the Son and Spirit in the work of redemption. Here we have the theological translation of Edwards' metaphysics of finality, viz. a 'theocentrism of ends' – 'ends' determined by God's choice.

But for Edwards, the idea of other possible worlds is simply an exercise in sophistry. Questions about 'best possible worlds' are red herrings that shift emphasis away from God to man, from the entire scheme of things to the individual. Certainly things *may* have included a greater degree of good or happiness for persons *A* and *B*. Which is to say, the world that exists does so by divine choice. Edwards says as much in a 1747 letter to Scottish divine, Thomas

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<sup>64</sup> *God of Grace*, 69. See also his convincing account of JE's theology of creation as Trinitarian in c. 3.

<sup>65</sup> See 'Essay on the Trinity' in *Treatise*. Cf. Holmes, *God of Grace*, 70; and below §3.

<sup>66</sup> 'The creation of all things was with an aim and subordination to that great work of Christ as Mediator, viz. the work of redemption. It was not only God's design in all the works of providence, from the beginning of the world ... but also in the creation of the world itself' (MS 'Blank Bible', note on Eph. 3:9 [Beinecke Library]).

<sup>67</sup> *M*702, *Works*18, 296.

<sup>68</sup> 'Sermon Twenty-Nine', *Works*9, 513.



Gillespie: ‘God ... is carrying on of his own designs in everything; but he is not carrying on that which is not his design.’<sup>69</sup> The point implies that the actualization of this world from among possible worlds (those which are *not* God’s design) is based upon an act of the will in God. In Edwards, God’s will is the final and ultimate arbiter. Consequently, as Paul Ramsey puts it, ‘there was ... no structure of possibilities above and beyond God’s providence and superior to his sovereignty.’<sup>70</sup> Deviating from a theocentric perspective on the world to investigate other ‘possibilities’ only casts aspersions on, first, God’s absolute sovereignty and, secondly, His omnisapience. Such posturing, Edwards believes, never contends with the two central issues of reality: (1) that ‘The Sole Consideration, that God is God’, if honestly contemplated, is ‘Sufficient to Still All Objections to His Sovereignty’; and (2) that God has ‘sufficient reasons’ for whatever He wills.<sup>71</sup> For Edwards, these assertions, especially the second of these, take precedence over all personal and sentimental concerns. Divine arbitrariness, omnipotence, and omnisapience are not doctrines for exploring hypotheticals; rather, they are the doctrines of God’s power to exercise effortlessly Himself to all that He is judiciously disposed. Edwards does not aim to refute the potentiality of other worlds (a thing that is irrelevant to him), but to underscore the fact there *is* only one world, because the creation only exists for the sake of God’s self-communicating/glorifying purposes through redemptive activities.<sup>72</sup>

This raises an interesting question: Could God have failed with regard to His redemptive and self-glorifying ‘ends’ in this world? Edwards speculates on this to one degree or another in *Freedom of the Will* when he articulates an apology for Christ’s impeccability, and answers that such a question begs for the impossible. Due to God’s nature and character, there is no way His will could founder. Consequently, Edwards does not speculate on what God might have done in another possible world; for him, only this reality matters to God. In one respect, then, the metaphysics argued in *End of Creation* prove insufficient and ultimately fall back on a Trinitarian foundation. For Edwards’ reasoning goes beyond a contention of ‘fittingness’ and the idealist argument of, were there no creation, then God would express Himself in vain, to imply that, without a creation God would not will the expressions of His nature/perfections.

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<sup>69</sup> *Works* 16, 230. Consequently, this particular world is not absolutely necessary – another point which argues against the charge of pantheism in JE.

<sup>70</sup> ‘EI’, *Works* 1, 117. Herein lies JE’s chief point of disagreement with Leibniz’ position with respect to ‘the best possible world.’

<sup>71</sup> (1735), *Banner-Works*, 2:107; *Works* 1, 388-91. Cf. Leibniz’ remarks in *Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, ed. Alexander, 16.

<sup>72</sup> Ramsey makes the connection between the aggregate good of the world and God’s end in it: ‘While God need not bring to pass all the good that is possible for each individual, the good of the whole which he brings to pass suffers no limitation from any realm of in-compossibility external to his own rational will. A world over which God rules is no doubt a good world, even the best world; but it is not to be termed the best of *all possible worlds*, nor ... the best that may have been chosen of all the possibilities. It is simply God’s world in the whole of it’ (‘EI’, *Works* 1, 117).



We now have the beginnings of an answer as to why God must be spatiotemporally present. It was not due to any temporality or potentiality in God per se, but because God's idea of a redemption scheme required time-orientation for the *ad extra* manifestation/communication of certain Trinitarian attributes and, correspondingly, time-oriented beings to perceive the communication of those divine perfections and Trinitarian attributes:

There are many of the divine attributes that, if God had not created the world, never would have had any exercise: the power of God, the wisdom and prudence and contrivance of God, and the goodness and mercy and grace of God, and the justice of God.

It may be inquired why God would have the exercises of his perfections and expressions of his glory known and published abroad. *Ans.* It was meet that his attributes and perfections should be expressed. It was the will of God that they should be expressed and should shine forth. But if the expressions of his attributes ben't known, they are not; the very being of the expression depends on the perception of created understandings. And so much the more as the expression is known [i.e. cognitively and affectionally], so much the more it is.<sup>73</sup>

But here, too, one may be tempted to say that there must have been a kind of inevitability to God exercising Himself toward this *epochal* 'end'; that there must have been some real temporality *in* God's disposition to exercise Himself temporally. Edwards, however, conscious of the philosophical difficulties that would arise if he allowed for temporality in God (especially in light of his theological tradition), speaks generically but cautiously by saying that it was 'a communicative disposition *in general*, or a disposition in the fullness of the divinity to flow out and diffuse itself.'<sup>74</sup> He recognizes that God's atemporality can only be upheld if and only if God is timeless intrinsically and extrinsically, internally and externally. The way he circumvents the problem of atemporalism is to say that God is timeless in His causal relation to the universe because that relation is 'entirely mental'. Prior actuality is all that there is for God.<sup>75</sup> The difference between God creating 'in time' and the notion of time being created 'in God's mind' or the idea of time communicated is a permanent fixture in Edwards' thinking apparatus: 'Things as to God exist from all eternity alike. That is, the idea is always the same, and after the same mode.'<sup>76</sup> God, therefore, does not create within the boundaries of time, but rather God invents and communicates the idea of time to intelligent minds, which, in turn, perceive some sequential rhythm of existence. But in God's mind, the series or sequence is but one changeless idea: His timelessness is both intrinsic and extrinsic. The idea of time in no way constrains God's omniscience or omnipotence, though it remains inevitable to the scheme of redemption and, therefore, God's program to manifest His fullness '*ad extra*'.

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<sup>73</sup> 'M'553, 662, *Works*18, 97, 200.

<sup>74</sup> *EofC*, *Works*8, 434-35.

<sup>75</sup> Thus, it could be contended that Lee is wrong on this point: there is no before/after for God – even with respect to the exercising of His dispositions. See *FW*, *Works*1, 266-69.

<sup>76</sup> 'The Mind' 36, *Works*6, 355. That there is no change in God's knowledge of reality, that is, no true element of temporality or sequential progression, see *Freedom of the Will*, 'Sec. 12. "Foreknowledge Inconsistent with Contingency' in *Works*1, 266-69.



All of this takes us to Edwards' final thesis in *End of Creation*, that it was a telic-oriented disposition in God to replicate externally His internal 'fullness' that 'excited' Him to create:

Therefore to speak more strictly according to truth ... *a disposition in God, as an original property of his nature, to an emanation of his own infinite fullness, was what excited him to create the world; and so that the emanation itself was aimed at by him as a last end of the creation.*<sup>77</sup>

It is this disposition in God that makes it possible for the Divine Being to 'emanate' His fullness '*ad extra*'. And it is this idea of an essential divine disposition that gives philosophical expression to Edwards' vision of divine comprehensiveness.

Because Edwards believes that God's 'disposition to communicate himself or diffuse his own *fullness*' is an original perfection of the divine nature, a disposition toward specific exercises which must have full expression, he therefore claims without qualification that God must have His fullness manifested externally. Which is to say, God must create. Edwards does not say that God *needs* to create because of some insufficiency, but He must because of who and what He is. Is divine freedom constrained with regard to creation? Only in the sense that if there was a possibility for God to have created another world, it would have been *like* this one, for the world is the particular 'fruit' of a particular telic-oriented divine disposition.<sup>78</sup> Edwards seems to think that a totally different world would require a totally different telos and, consequently, compromise the centrality of God's redemptive scheme and triune nature.

Thus, we find Edwards wrestling with his Reformed tradition concerning divine freedom and creation. Not only *must* God create but He is in some non-absolute sense dependent upon *IPMs* in order for both that creation (and their existence) and His being to have an *ad extra* reality and value. The telos of redemption limits God's acts concerning creation by making it a relational process—not just amongst the economic Trinity, but also with *other* perceiving minds. Edwards denies that this is a limitation of divine omnipotence. Instead, it is 'The Wisdom of God Displayed in the Way of Salvation' (1733), and therefore a resolute expression of omnipotence. Either way, even a hint of God's dependence upon the creature for '*ad extra*' manifestation would have caused Calvin not a little discomfort, particularly from one famed for sermons like *God Glorified in Man's Dependence* (1731).

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Edwards' 'Miscellanies' entries on the 'end of creation', which culminated in the dissertation on the topic, signal a second and final shift in the emphasis of his theocentricity. The first shift occurred shortly after his conversion when he moved from what could be called a

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<sup>77</sup> *Works*8, 435.

<sup>78</sup> In distinction from the strongly necessitarian disposition of God toward Himself (God's metadisposition), the disposition which brings about creation may be considered weakly necessitarian. There is a necessity or inevitability to the emanationistic disposition – it must be exercised and, with respect to redemption, it must have certain features of a certain kind; for instance, every set of that kind must have a fall, a divine Redeemer, etc. This is not unique to JE. Thomas Aquinas in *Contra Gentiles* said God had to create but not necessarily *this* world, though the world is the result of the fullness of God. See MacDonald's discussion on Thomas Aquinas in, *Being and Goodness*, c. 4.



generic ‘theocentrism of religion’ (God at center of the Christian religion) to a something like a ‘theocentrism of origins’ (God, the necessary being for existences, consciousnesses and causes). The final shift was from this to one that became not only the distinct emphasis of his philosophical-theological career, but also a principle that operated as the cohesive and overarching theory in his thought – a ‘theocentrism of ends’.

Thus far we have considered (1) how Edwards’ spiritual sense facilitated for him a vision of God-at-the-center-of-reality, (2) how he understood that reality to be a matrix of divine beauty or the reality of God’s comprehensiveness, and (3) that God’s all-comprehension includes and comprises the ‘fruit’ of a particular disposition essential to God’s nature and essence: which is to say, Edwards’ metaphysics of finality suggests that the ‘ends’ appropriate to the divine nature are inseparable from the very nature or essence which determines the Divine Being. We may further add that, for Edwards, telic-orientation is not a ‘non-moral’ propensity, but one intrinsically moral due to its relational nature. (Edwards at any time can turn the conversation into one of God’s love or His self-expression as love.)

As Edwards’ spiritual worldview begins to take shape, it incorporates and develops fundamental theological concepts of God, the Trinity, the work of Christ and the Spirit, and the entire drama of redemption in time. Reality was not only to be *reconceived* and *reinterpreted* in light of God’s all-encompassing presence, but also the purpose of the Divine Being’s presence in every facet of existence.

### **1.c. *The Becomingness of God through Self-enlargement***

Like so many theological systematicians and philosophical theologians throughout the ages, Jonathan Edwards sought to maintain a coherent balance between the presentation of an immutable God and God’s creative, communicative, and purposeful activity – the God that he spiritually envisioned as sublimely but beautifully present in this realm. So when his apologetical ‘*Ens Entium*’ was philosophically depicted in ‘M’107[b] as the ‘Being’ whose ‘essence is inclined to communicate himself,’ he was making a conscious attempt to assuage the tension between the God who ‘*enlarges* himself in a more excellent and divine manner’ (*End of Creation*) and a totally changeless God, without any element of potentiality in Him. In ‘M’107[b], Edwards addressed the same question with which every notable theologian from antiquity to Aquinas and Aquinas to himself wrestled: How could an immutable Being be capable of any creative and purposeful activity with the world?

This question is also one of value and meaning: If the life of God is unaffected by His relation to the world (‘impassible’), then how can God’s involvement in the world have any genuine meaning to either Himself or the world? Held in tension by these questions are the issues of the being and becoming of God, and the impassibility and communicativeness of God; the implications of which encroach upon both sentient and non-sentient beings. For



Edwards, then, the challenge was to present coherently God's immanence (contra deism), while maintaining God's transcendent immutability (contra materialism).

Interpreters of Edwards have usually understood his idea of God's creativity not as static, but as an activity of divine self-communication.<sup>79</sup> Self-communication in this scheme is a mono-directional activity in which God, in His prior actuality and perfection, gives rather than receives. Since the Divine Being only gives out of His 'fullness', God's completeness and actuality presumably are not compromised. God still is, so to speak, a 'full bucket.'<sup>80</sup>

Yet, even if the self-communicating God of Edwards is not just an inherently beautiful being, but an inherently *beautifying* being creating out of his 'fullness' (à la Delattre),<sup>81</sup> such an idea, as Sang Lee points out, still does not explain the sense in which Edwards speaks of God's *self-enlargement* and *expansion* through divine activity in the time/space continuum. Additionally, explains Lee, the analysis of Edwards' idea as merely Neoplatonic, emanationistic, hierarchical, proves inadequate upon recognition of the fact that he combines his emanationistic metaphorical language with a teleological vision in his discussion of God's self-communication.<sup>82</sup> As Edwards explains, God creates out of

a delight in his own infinite goodness; or the exercise of that glorious propensity of his nature to diffuse and communicate himself, and so gratifying this inclination of his own heart ... to communicate of his own excellent fullness.<sup>83</sup>

There is a premium on intentionality here. God is not simply 'diffusing' or 'emanating' meaninglessly. Instead there is a very real, singular, and functional telos to God's willful creative activity. Which is to say, *God's sufficient reason* (which is inseparable from that which is moral in God) *gives telos*.<sup>84</sup> A merely Neoplatonic or emanationistic analysis of Edwards' 'scale of being' does not answer the question 'Why?' To Edwards, God's 'ultimate end' is 'the glory of God.'<sup>85</sup> Therefore, he asserts, the movement of world history has real meaning to God, while God gives meaning and ontology to world history. Thus far Edwards and Thomas Aquinas and Reformed Scholasticism are on the same page. All would agree that God created in a certain way, namely, in a telic fashion. Yet Edwards seems to intend more than mere self-communication as the divine telos. Lee is quick to point out that in *End of Creation* Edwards says God's emanating activities are 'an *increase, repetition, or*

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<sup>79</sup> McClymond, *Encounters*, 56; Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 172.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility*, 168-84; and Smith, 'Jonathan Edwards as Philosophical Theologian', 314-19.

<sup>81</sup> *Beauty and Sensibility*, 169. Delattre does not collapse being in to beauty, but maintains being as a more basic metaphysical category: 'Beauty,' he says, '...is ultimately to be resolved into being' (25).

<sup>82</sup> *Philosophical Theology*, 172.

<sup>83</sup> *EofC, Works8*, 445-46.

<sup>84</sup> Additionally, God's sufficient reason is the force behind JE's meaning of philosophical necessity or moral necessity as distinct from natural necessity. Cf. Ramsey, 'EI', *Works1*, 35, 108 n.9.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 526.



*multiplication*’ of the divine excellency or fullness.<sup>86</sup> On this evidence, it seems Edwards does not merely wish to say with his theological tradition that God solely intends to communicate His perfection for glorification, but that God somehow ‘enlarges’ Himself by expanding into temporality.

Lee believes Edwards’ concept of God is ontologically unique, and that its uniqueness lies in his conception of God ‘as essentially a disposition.’<sup>87</sup> Lee does not merely say that God possesses dispositions but that His most irreducible essence *is* a disposition. ‘The philosophical renovation utilized in Edwards’s theological reconstruction,’ Lee argues, ‘is the replacement of the age-old notion of substance with the idea of disposition or habit.’ This assertion does not simply apply to the created order but holds for God too. Edwards began to think about God’s being, explains Lee, ‘in terms not of substance ... but – utilizing a new language – in terms of dispositional forces.’<sup>88</sup> Despite making ‘a new beginning in Christian theology’, according to Lee, the mediating capacity of Edwards’ new ontology enables him ‘to reaffirm in the strongest possible terms his theological tradition’ within a ‘modern philosophical framework.’<sup>89</sup> That is, Edwards remained faithful to his theological tradition because he conceived of God’s dispositional essence as ‘perfect in actuality and also inherently disposed to further actualizations – that is, to repetitions of the prior actuality.’<sup>90</sup>

The upshot of this thinking holds that what is ‘repeated’ *ad extra* really is God in all His fullness, not merely in terms of communicated glory, but God exercising His ‘diffusive disposition’ in such a way that His prior actuality remains intact. Yet if we consider this scenario sequentially it suggests ‘more’ God after He exercises His diffusive disposition than before. Is Lee correct? Does Edwards posit a God that expands sequentially, proportionately, essentially, or otherwise?

There is no question that Lee is correct to assert Edwards’ employment of dispositional concepts in his ontology. This is clear from ‘M’241 and a number of other places. Edwards even speaks of dispositions that are ‘necessary’ to ‘the divine nature and essence itself’ (MS sermon Deut. 32:4). Nevertheless, there are two things which must be addressed here: (1) how Edwards conceives of God’s essence; and (2) what he really means and intends by ‘*ad extra*’, which in turn affects the meaning of ‘an *increase, repetition, or multiplication*’.

Concerning the first point, Lee has been too reductionistic in his analysis of Edwards and dispositions: Edwards never abandoned speaking of God’s essence in terms of ‘substance’. For instance, we find him writing a year after his conversion that, ‘there is no proper substance but God himself’, and again in 1727 that, ‘there is no such distinction in God of

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 433.

<sup>87</sup> *Philosophical Theology*, 173.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Lee, ‘Edwards on God and Nature’ in *Edwards in Our Time*, 18, 17.



substance and property.’ There is also a 1747 ‘The Mind’ entry entitled ‘SUBSTANCE’, in which he speaks of God’s ‘substance’ composing the substratum of reality. In fact, in 1756, approximately a year before his death, he drafted a series of notes known as ‘Notes on Knowledge and Existence’ that correspond in content to some of the philosophical arguments in *Original Sin*. In them he writes, ‘God is as it were the only substance, or rather, the perfection and steadfastness of his knowledge, wisdom, power and will.’<sup>91</sup>

Neither did Edwards conceive of God’s essence *only* as a disposition (or even a set of dispositions). Instead, his usual manner of speaking of God’s essence, while distinctly idealist, retains a Thomistic (i.e. Aristotelian-Scholastic) character. Consider ‘M’94:

God’s intuition on himself, without doubt, is immediate. But ’tis certain it cannot be, except his idea be his essence; for his idea is the immediate object of his intuition ... And if so, and all God’s ideas are only the one idea of himself, as has been shown, [then God’s idea of himself] must be his essence itself. It must be a substantial idea, having all the perfections of the substance perfectly.<sup>92</sup>

And now Thomas Aquinas:

The supreme and perfect grade of life is found in mind ... the highest perfection of life is in God, where activity is not distinct from being, and where the concept is the divine essence, and where substance is not distinct from essence.<sup>93</sup>

Nor can Lee claim that the philosophical nomenclature that Edwards employed was new: for both Thomas and Reformed Scholastics spoke of God’s dispositions. Lee cannot even say that the meanings of ‘substance’, ‘subsistence’, and ‘property’ have changed for Edwards to accommodate a dispositional conception of God. As the sermon on Deut. 32:4 shows, substance and property are employed in fashion completely compatible with Scholastic use:

In our selves we distinguish between our souls and the disposition or inclination of our souls – the one in a substance, the other an accident or property of that substance. But there is no such distinction in God of substance and property. This is opposite to the simplicity of God’s nature; but all that is in God is God.

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<sup>91</sup> ‘Of Atoms’, *Works*6, 215; cf. ‘Things to be Considered’ No. 44, *Works* 6, 238; Deut. 32:4 (1727); ‘The Mind’ 61, *Works*6, 376; *Works*6, 398.

<sup>92</sup> ‘M’94, *Works*13, 258. Cf. ‘Observations Concerning the Trinity’ in *Treatise*.

<sup>93</sup> *IV Contra Gentiles*, II. Cf. Opusc. VII, *de Substantiis ad Fratrum Reginaldum socium carissimum*: ‘[T]he substance of God is his understanding of himself’, 12. I refer to Thomas only comparatively. He neither appears in the ‘Catalogue’ nor the ‘Dummer’ collection nor Timothy Edwards’ library, though Stoddard did possess two volumes of Thomas’ works and one of the later Thomist, Francisco Suárez (See Fiering, ‘Solomon Stoddard’s Library at Harvard’, 262-69). The Yale 1742 library (listed in 1743) does include ‘Aqinatis Summa’ (ed. and number of vols. not specified). But it is by no means certain that this was in the Yale Library when JE was a student/tutor. However, we may be reasonably certain that JE read Stoddard’s volumes or some other way came about to have some knowledge of the gist of Thomas’ thought. Surprisingly, there is only one reference to Thomas in JE’s corpus (*Works*1, 228), where in *FW* he is mentioned along with Duns Scotus as a principle example of ‘unintelligible’ Roman Catholic Scholastic theology – Thomas and Duns Scotus representing for him the worst aspects of medieval Scholasticism. The reason why JE may not have found Thomas (publicly) useful may be explained by Louis Cognet: ‘The Reformed, especially the Calvinists, refused to recognize medieval theology, viewing it as the application of totally heathen logic (Aristotle) to the realities of revelation’ (in *History of the Church*, Vol. VI, ed. H. Jedin, 97).



In contradistinction to the various levels of reality, Thomas and the Scholastics asserted that God alone is incomposite and purely actual, that the essence of every substance except God is distinct from its existence. The difference between God and created existences lies in the fact that existence is not included in the notion of an essence or quiddity, that is, being or existence is not contained in the *definition* of their essence. God serves as the only exception, for He is, in short, subsistent being, in whom substance and properties are collapsed into *esse*. We cannot conceive of His essence as non-existent, for in Him essence and existence are identical in reality.<sup>94</sup> Edwards never abandons these ideas, but aligns himself with them.<sup>95</sup>

To be sure, Edwards does speak about dispositions that are necessary to the divine nature and essence, but such that have a *locus* – they are *of* the divine nature and essence, and they are *in* God. Moreover, it is God’s *fullness* that is capable of communication or emanation *ad extra*. Excerpts from *End of Creation* make these assertions certain:

The disposition to communicate himself or diffuse his own *fullness*, which we must conceive of as being originally *in God* as a perfection of his nature.... The diffusive disposition *in the nature of God*, that moved him to create the world ... or a disposition *in the fullness* of the divinity to flow out and diffuse itself.’<sup>96</sup>

According to Edwards, ‘all that is in God is God’. This includes essential dispositions but it does not make God a disposition. As a matter of fact, so far is Edwards from abandoning Scholastic categories in this sense, he even says that, conceptually speaking, God’s irreducible essence is an inexplicable ‘substance’ (‘the one idea of Himself’) and the disposition to diffuse Himself may be thought of as a property:

[W]e may suppose *that a disposition in God, as an original property of his nature, to an emanation of his own infinite fullness, was what excited him to create the world.*<sup>97</sup>

In reality, however, there is ‘no such distinction in God between substance and property’, for both God’s *ens* and *esse* are one.

In our second point (what Edwards means by ‘*ad extra*’), we find Lee takes Edwards too literally. When Edwards writes about God’s ‘multiplication’, ‘increase’, and ‘repetition’, in each case he prefaces these words with the rhetorical qualifiers, ‘in some sense’, ‘as it were’ or ‘in effect’.<sup>98</sup> Because Lee does not take Edwards’ language figuratively, he can assert that

<sup>94</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Being and Essence*, IV, §§6, 7.

<sup>95</sup> Here Lee would claim that in JE’s dispositional conception of reality, ‘Habits and laws ... *are* the abiding principles of reality’ (*Philosophical Theology*, 48). Thus Lee attempts to equate being with dispositions. But, as Leon Chai argues, such an arrangement requires the equating of laws with powers, which cannot be maintained: ‘a law has to do with the manner in which a power is exercised, rather than the power itself’ (*Limits of Enlightenment*, 143). Moreover, since JE states that God’s essence is ‘the one idea of Himself’, Lee would have to equate disposition with ideas, which is precisely what he thesis does not say. For Lee, dispositions have ‘a distinguishable reality not only from human minds but also from God as well’ (‘Edwards on God and Nature’ in *Edwards in Our Time*, 28). *V.s.* §2.a.

<sup>96</sup> *Works*8, 422, 432, 433, 434, 435. Emphasis mine.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 435. Italics JE; underscoring added.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 433, 440. Cf. Suter, ‘A Note on Platonism in the Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards’, 283-84.



dispositions have an abiding ontological existence not in but outside of the mind of God, and that it is in this world of abiding ontological existences that God truly ‘multiplies’ His reality in *another* reality; so that, sequentially and proportionately, one may say, God has increased.

Lee’s analysis proves inadequate for a number of reasons. First, Edwards’ language does not lend itself to a literal interpretation. Second, Lee almost makes the exercise of God’s disposition to communicate Himself a mechanistic impulse rather than understanding it in conjunction with Edwards’ idealism (this ties into the first point about God’s essence being ‘the idea He has of Himself’ [*M*’94]). Lastly (and in connection with the preceding point), the whole notion of self-communication/replication must be understood within the framework of Edwards’ idealism. If, as Lee says, God’s idea of Himself is prior and actual (agreeable to Edwards), then we must understand that what the divine impulse aims at is to have that *idea* (of the divine fullness) perceived. As this idea is perceived, or (better) communicated to *IPMs* by God, it becomes, ‘*as it were, ad extra*’ in the sense that it is *in other minds*: God outside Himself is the idea of Himself (or His fullness) *in* the minds of intelligent perceivers. *This* is how God replicates Himself, according to Edwards.<sup>99</sup>

Strictly speaking, Edwards’ idea of God *in* other minds attributes something of ontological peculiarity to God and therefore a diversion from his theological tradition. For instance, Reformed theology has typically made a distinction between God’s essential and manifest glory. Usually it is the manifested glory that is intended when the question is asked, whether God does everything for His own glory; whether in His works His object is to reveal to intelligent beings the intrinsic and inherent glory of His being and nature. The essential glory of God typically means all that is glorious in God; in other words, His ‘fullness’. Likewise for Edwards, ‘glory’ is a general term to denote the sum-total of all the qualities that constitute God’s excellence. The nature and attributes of God are the glory of God. They make Him a glorious being. Where it seems that Edwards incorporates innovations to this position is with his statement regarding God’s ‘own glory *existing* in its emanation.’ His tradition would assert that the essential glory of God is a fixed quality. There can be neither increase nor diminution of it. The manifestation of the glory of God in the temporal realm is just that, a manifestation of glory. God is not present here in any quasi-substantial or essential sense, but in activity and will – the glory manifested in the work of creation. However, Edwards’ language and intent must be distinguished from a mere ‘language of glory’ or say,

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<sup>99</sup> Even the idea of those minds is *not* to be thought of as perfectly outside of the mind of God; they too are ideas prior to God about how God might be *ad extra*. Thus when God conceives of Himself *ad extra* in/through those minds, He must also somehow conceive of Himself *as* those minds. JE, sensitive to the need of having to account for the perceiving minds in/through which God ‘replicates’ Himself, resorts to pantheistic and panentheistic language and makes their existences instances of God’s being: hence, God is ‘the sum of all being’, ‘the only real being’, ‘Being in general’, etc. Here we begin to see the value and role natural-men and reprobates have in God’s program of self-communication/glorification.



Thomas Aquinas' assertion that 'the first cause, who is purely active and without possibility, does not work to acquire an end, but intends solely to communicate his perfection.'<sup>100</sup> As Edwards contends, God's manifest glory is *not* something distinct from His substantial glory: for him, God's fullness, whether *ad intra* or *ad extra*, is God. '*Ad extra*' is really God present in, 'as it were', another mode or sphere of existence, namely, *in* created minds as Himself and the beautiful matrix of existences; which, when narrowly considered, really is no different *kind* of existence to God, because all modes of God's existence are 'always the same, and after the same mode.' Thus, there is no change as to how God conceives of Himself.

Edwards' ontological peculiarity, then, does not consist of God really expanding in the sense that Lee intimates. Rather, it consists of the *idea* of God's glory *in* created minds, which is nothing other than the immutable God in the mind according to divinely determined degrees.<sup>101</sup> This is Edwards' middle way, where he articulates something orthodox and something innovative in the same thought. In one instance, he says all that is communicated is God's manifest glory (this is the end of creation to which his tradition would concede),<sup>102</sup> while in the same breath he says that God is, *as it were*, expanded because what *is* present *is* God, not simply His manifest glory.<sup>103</sup>

If we understand expressions of 'repetition' not in an unqualified literal sense, but in the sense that these are concepts which help to communicate the idea of God giving exercise to a disposition(s) to communicate Himself as existing in a different realm (the idea of a spatiotemporal realm), then we are in a position to ascertain the inner logic of Edwards' notion of the self-communication of God.

What constitutes his doctrine concerning God as absolutely prior and patently self-'enlarging' in and through created minds may be found in *End of Creation*, where Edwards responds to a charge of inconsistency for holding both positions:

Though it be true that God's glory and happiness are in and of himself, are infinite and can't be added to, unchangeable for the whole and every part of which he is perfectly independent of the creature; yet it don't hence follow, nor is it true, that God had no real and proper delight, pleasure or happiness, in any of his acts or communications relative to the creature; or effects however produces in them; or in anything he sees in the creature's qualifications, dispositions, actions, and state. God may have a real and proper pleasure or happiness in seeing the happy state of the creature: *yet this may not be different from his delight in himself*; being a delight in his own infinite goodness; or the exercise of that glorious propensity of his nature to diffuse and

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<sup>100</sup> *Summa Theologia*, I, Q44, A4.

<sup>101</sup> Correspondingly, our conception of reality is understood by 'degrees' ('M'662, *Works*18, 200). The more God communicates ideas that resonate in our minds, the more of God (who communicates the 'ideas of existence') we perceive, and therefore the more our perception of reality corresponds with the 'truth', i.e. God's truth concerning reality.

<sup>102</sup> Which JE reinforces with the statement: 'He [God] can't create the world to the end that he may have existence; or may have such attributes and perfections, and such an essence' (*Works*8, 469).

<sup>103</sup> 'M'448, *Works*13, 495.



communicate himself, and so gratifying this inclination of his own heart ... to communicate of his own excellent fullness.<sup>104</sup>

The act of creation—where we find the whole ‘scale of created existence’—is, then, the exercise of that propensity in God’s nature to ‘diffuse’ and ‘communicate’ the fullness of Himself. Clarified further, Edwards believes that the diffusive disposition that moved God to give creatures and non-sentient entities existence was a communicative disposition ‘in general’, precluding the hypothetical existence of any thing or being: ‘This disposition or desire in God must be prior to the existence of the creature, even in intention and foresight ... For it is a disposition that is the original ground of the existence of the creature.’<sup>105</sup>

After concluding that creation is the effect of an inherent telic-oriented disposition in God to ‘emanate’, Edwards explains how God ‘manifests a supreme and ultimate regard to himself in all his works.’ He reasons that God’s self-regard generates, ‘as it were,’ an external impulse toward self-communication because God is disposed to an ‘abundant communication, and glorious emanation of that infinite fullness of good which he possesses in himself.’<sup>106</sup> This propensity in God to ‘diffuse’ Himself may be considered as ‘a propensity to *himself diffused*’ (Lee), or ‘to his own glory existing in its emanation’ (Edwards).<sup>107</sup> What he means by this are three things. First, that there is a disposition within God to manifest His glory in another dimension, namely a temporal dimension; and that that manifestation of His glory cannot be separated from what it is that makes Him glorious, namely His beautiful being. Therefore, if God is to manifest ‘externally’ His glory He must externally manifest Himself. This is accomplished by exercising His disposition toward that particular end. Second, this particular ‘end’ of manifestation is inextricably bound up with the totality of God’s attributes or, the ‘fullness’ of His being. And third, although God does not create out of need to fulfill a lack or deficiency, yet there is a kind of inevitability that God must create and that His presence in whatever world He creates must be perceived by *IPBs* from within that realm in order for it to be a ‘manifested’, ‘expressed’, and ‘expanded’ reality. But, and this is key, He must be perceived in accordance with His essential self, that is, as an idea.

Thus we have what may be considered both the ‘beingness’ and ‘becomingness’ of God presented in the concept of an essentially diffusive disposition: ‘God looks on the communication of himself, and the emanation of the infinite glory and good [the

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<sup>104</sup> *EofC*, *Works8*, 445-46. Emphasis added.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 438.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 436, 438. Ramsey comments that, ‘Insofar as this ... Pauline concept [of *πλερωμα*] is used in the first chapter [of *EofC*] as a concept in philosophical theology referring to one of the metaphysical perfections of Deity, it displaces “goodness” in JE’s lifelong attempts to express adequately his vision of God’s end in *originally* giving creatures being. The same overriding importance must be ascribed to God’s “love” or “benevolence” in its larger sense’ (*Works8*, 438 n. 4). In short, ‘fullness’ replaces ‘goodness’ in *EofC*, as an explanation of that perfection *in* God that gives futurity to creatures. Cf. JE’s exposition of Eph. 1:22-23 with regard to ‘fullness’ in *Works15*, 185-86.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 439.



becomingness of God] that are in himself [the beingness of God] to belong to the fullness and completeness of himself, as though he were not in his most complete and glorious state without it.’<sup>108</sup> For Edwards, then, God *is* full and fully actual, but because of God’s diffusive disposition it is requisite that that fullness be, as Edwards puts it, ‘*ad extra*’.

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God replicated in temporal reality does not mean that the Divine Being is ‘more’ than before. Indeed, not even the incarnation added to God’s glory, according to Edwards, it simply ‘received an additional manifestation.’<sup>109</sup> Instead, God’s temporal replication facilitates an extra-dimensional manifestation.<sup>110</sup> In the *historia salutis*, the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection are that process at its apogee; its culmination is the consummation of the age.

God’s expansiveness (or comprehensiveness) therefore facilitates a mode of existence for God’s fullness that is beyond temporality in the limiting, constraining sense that human beings experience, but which is not simply a negation of temporality altogether.

It must be stressed, however, that what seems to be an allowance for potentiality in God with respect to time and change is really an eternal *mental* reality in the divine mind:

[‘*M*’]553.... ’Tis true that there was from eternity that act in God within himself and towards himself, that was the exercise of the same perfection of his nature. But it was not the same kind of exercise; it virtually contained it, but there was not explicitly the same exercise of his perfection. God, who delights in the exercise of his own perfection, delights in all the kinds of its exercise ... But God, who delights in his own perfection, delights in seeing those exercises of his perfection explicitly in being, that are fundamentally implied.

God’s idea of Himself, therefore, includes an idea of Himself ‘virtually’ manifested and, therefore, may be considered a perfect and unchanged idea, for to God ‘the idea is always the same, and after the same mode.’ The point is that, although the disposition to be externally replicated was not actualized from a temporal perspective ‘until’ created intelligences existed,<sup>111</sup> nevertheless it possessed a mode of reality for which he can find no better term than ‘virtual’, that for all intents and purposes could be accounted as a full exercise and prior actuality. But for there to be a reality *ad extra* it must move beyond virtuality to manifest reality with respect to the dimension God purposes to ‘expand’ Himself, namely, as being perceived in/through created intelligences.<sup>112</sup> This seeming potentiality is, then, the actuality of God’s all-comprehension.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> ‘*M*’727, *Works*18, 353.

<sup>110</sup> Therefore, Keith Ward’s proposal of a God possessed of a ‘dynamic infinity’, where there is an admission of temporality and potentiality in God, does not apply to JE’s case. Although JE does offer several innovations concerning dispositions and ontological structure, and he claims that there is a sense in which the universe is an inevitable expression or emanation of the reality of God, yet his claims for divine self-sufficiency, immutability, and impassibility do not allow him to be categorized as one who espouses ‘inclusive infinity.’ See Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*, 2-5.

<sup>111</sup> Presumably for JE there is no *temporal* ‘until’ in this respect.

<sup>112</sup> This calls for a distinction in JE’s use of ‘real’, ‘reality’, ‘actual’ and ‘actuality’. On the one hand, there is God’s reality about Himself, which is complete and full. While on the other hand, there is the



### 1.d. *Divine Comprehensiveness*

Henry B. Veatch suggests that the tendency to consider a universal as a changeless entity arose with Descartes and the rise of the new science.<sup>113</sup> The mathematical paradigm determined the Cartesian metaphilosophy. The Cartesian revolution in philosophy, Anthony Lisska argues, destroyed the concept of disposition as a significant ontological category: ‘Without this category Aquinian accounts of essence fall by the wayside.’<sup>114</sup> By bringing essential dispositions into his discussion of God Edwards was inadvertently addressing Descartes’ mathematical ontology while consciously contesting Hobbes’ material ontology, wherein dispositions were excluded from the discussion because of the difficulty of ascribing numeric values or material properties (or substance-being) to them. For Edwards, divine dispositions allow for God to be free from the scrutiny of scientific measurement and the ‘atheism’ of materialism,<sup>115</sup> yet their logic gives a strong degree of certainty concerning their exercises. His conception of dispositions in God, therefore, is not like Descartes’ static *habitus*, but like Thomas Aquinas’ dynamically expansive *habitus* in a God who must create because of that inherent propensity to create.<sup>116</sup> They are peculiar and fundamental to the Divine Being in that, while they necessarily and indissolubly belong to God’s ontological essence, they also make up the relational structure of God’s triunity (*v.i.* §3).

What Edwards has been trying to account for through his explanation of a ‘diffusive’ divine disposition are four things: (1) a philosophical explanation for how God could be temporally present; (2) an answer to the questions of how and why God could/would intentionally create anything at all – with ‘cause’ meaning, for Edwards, God’s sufficient reason for something to be and to be for some telic end, (3) and provide a means of accounting for the value of each and everything that is created; and (4) account for the difference between his understanding of teleology as the account of the temporal actualization of a divine disposition (which, by virtue of its very nature, tends toward a ‘telos’ or ‘end’) and the developmental teleology as evidenced in the writings of pantheists or deists. In short, his employment of disposition in this capacity offered a philosophical explanation of God’s comprehensiveness.

Although Edwards’ meaning of comprehension was mentioned earlier, yet one point requires emphasizing before we begin to examine in §2 how he, in light of this doctrine, used dispositional concepts in metaphysics. The point concerns the matrix of reality and its being

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the perspective of the creature that consists of God’s communication of His reality as their temporal reality, which they only receive (perceive) in part, due to their finite capacities/capabilities and God’s selective (accommodating and purposeful) method(s) of communication.

<sup>113</sup> Veatch, ‘Telos and Teleology in Aristotle’s Ethics’ in *Studies in Aristotle*, ed. O’Meara, 279-86.

<sup>114</sup> Lisska, *Aquinas’s Theory of Natural Law*, 97.

<sup>115</sup> JE offers sustained critiques of atheism and its relation to what he calls ‘Hobbesical materialism’ in Rom. 1:20 (1743) and ‘Practical Atheism’ (1730), *Works* 17, 47ff.

<sup>116</sup> *Summa Theologia*, I, Q12, A5. Lee provides a detailed history and analysis of the ideas of ‘habit’ or ‘disposition’ in JE’s background (*Philosophical Theology*, 15-46).



‘comprehended’ by God’s existence. I reiterate this point because it will be important for us to take into account that whether Edwards speaks of causal occurrences or material bodies or minds, this world cannot in any way be thought of as existing or operating independent of God’s immediate knowledge, essence, and power.

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Following his conversion Edwards saw God’s excellence or beauty in every aspect of life. He concluded that for God’s beauty to be so it must be inclusive of the created order. Since the beauty was the same (that is, it was all one beauty – the beauty of God’s being), he then concluded that God’s beautiful being must be the matrix through which created reality exists, is known and experienced.<sup>117</sup> His metaphysical designation for this was ‘Being in general’, under which both ‘the system of created being’ and the Creator Himself were subsumed. ‘Being in general’ is, in Edwards’ words, ‘the great all-comprehending system’, ‘comprehending the sum total of universal existence, both Creator and creature.’<sup>118</sup> God’s comprehensiveness is that ‘system’ or, as I say, ‘matrix’; it is the manifestation or external replication of the divine fullness; it is how God’s abiding immanent/transcendent presence may be understood; and it is the mode of God’s reality in the world that is the spiritual/mental/moral reality of the world, which comprehends all of the Divine Being’s acts and power.<sup>119</sup> In a word, divine comprehensiveness is God’s inclusiveness or His fullness replicated ‘*ad extra*’.

## ***2. The Application of Jonathan Edwards’ Dispositional Concepts***

As Edwards continued to refine his explanations of conversion, the ‘end of creation’, and God’s activity and presence in both, he would turn to his scientific and philosophical notebooks from time to time and pen an entry on how the dispositional concepts connected with those ideas would/could be applied to ‘Natural Philosophy’.<sup>120</sup> Some of the entries pertained to causality or atoms, some to minds, and others to phenomena like motion, light or gravity. All, however, evidence his conviction that ‘It is laws that constitute all permanent being in created things, both corporeal and spiritual.’<sup>121</sup>

This conviction emerged from his analysis of (1) God’s relation to the world, which he perceived to be so purposeful, ordered, and consistent as to be lawlike; (2) his understanding

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<sup>117</sup> ‘[God’s] fullness ... is the fountain, and so the sum and comprehension of everything that is excellent ... [He] comprehends all entity, and all excellence in His own excellence’ (*Works* 8, 460).

<sup>118</sup> *Works* 8, 556, 423.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 406.

<sup>120</sup> ‘Natural Philosophy’ also is a collection of essays and scientific notes, which include a number of metaphysical and epistemological essays. For more on the content, composition, and significance of this series, see Anderson’s ‘EI’, *Works* 6, 29-31, 173-91 and *Dwight-Works*, 1:664-761.

<sup>121</sup> ‘Subjects to be Handled in the Treatise on the Mind’, *Works* 6, 391.



of Newtonian physics in which the world's phenomena were understood to be mechanistic and lawlike; and (3) his grasp of Biblical anthropology and eschatological fulfillment. These ideas meet in telic-dispositions: the world is established as a network of, and God's relation to the world is conducted through, lawlike principles. To be sure, the world in fact is an ideal one, but one that can be described and understood in terms of lawlike dispositions.

In 'M'1263, Edwards explains that there are two ways in which God operates, arbitrarily (which is an unmitigated and simple mental exercise) and naturally (operations that are 'limited' by fixed laws, which God by his arbitrary operation establishes). The one is unsounded and impenetrable; the other is regular and established. Edwards' analysis of all created phenomena, mental or otherwise, rests upon the latter. Not only are all ideas 'communicated to us, and to other minds, according to certain fixed and exact established methods and laws' by God, but even God's ideas about the world are 'constant and regular,' due to the 'infinitely exact, precise and stable will [of God].' Consequently, Edwards writes that, 'God is pleased to act by Rules which He fixes: thus the Law of nature – the Laws which natural effects are produces.'<sup>122</sup> Therefore, if, as Edwards says, 'the very being of created things depends on laws, or stated methods fixed by God, of events following one another,'<sup>123</sup> then it would not be difficult to see how God may be *in*—as well as control—all things, by conceiving of them as telic-oriented principles, that is, as lawlike dispositions, whereupon, 'such actions upon such occasions should be exerted'.<sup>124</sup> The same applies to the reception/perception of ideas: all things are composed and regulated by divinely established and empowered lawlike dispositions.

In the following section we take a necessary excursion into Edwards' meaning of disposition and how, in his conception of God comprehending the created order, dispositions are used to explain God's relation to causality, material bodies, and created existences; or, in other words, how he applies his theocentric metaphysics to evidence God's comprehension of everything. This will lead us into a consideration of Edwards' innovative conception of God's triunity, upon which his ontology and calculus of value for human beings are based.

### 2.a. *Edwards, a Platonic Realist?*

To begin with, what made Edwards' use of these telic-oriented, dispositional concepts possible were several things. First, it was entirely permissible. Here I am not talking about the intellectual climate of the Enlightenment, but Edwards' own theological heritage, which traditionally employed dispositional concepts. As Sang Lee points out, Reformed theologians and Puritan divines like William Ames, John Owen, and Thomas Shephard, found it

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<sup>122</sup> 'M'1263, *PJE*, 184-85, 186.

<sup>123</sup> 'The Mind' 27, 13, and 'Subjects to be Handled', *Works*6, 351, 344, 391-92.

<sup>124</sup> 'M'241, *Works*13, 358.



permissible to apply the nomenclature of disposition to theological subjects.<sup>125</sup> Secondly, he would have been familiar not only with the theological employments of ‘disposition’, but also the accommodating definitions provided by the logicians he read at Yale.<sup>126</sup> Third, a ‘theocentrism of ends’ did not conflict with the usage of dispositions, but rather complemented it. For example, in his way of thinking, a dispositional property, by definition, is a potentiality directed toward a specific development or ‘end’; hence its telic-orientation. A disposition, then, is a capacity to ‘do something’ which an object possesses. Like most Aristotelian terms, there are analogical uses of disposition, but also for Edwards there are ontological dispositions that constitute the ontic structure of relational existence (more on this below). Fourth, dispositions could be defined and employed in such a way as to be theoretically compatible with the nomic regularity of Newtonian science, which had become the touchstone for any proposal discussing the phenomena of the universe. And lastly, there was Edwards’ disappointment with John Locke’s failing attempt to resolve being into a ‘something which we know not what.’ What Locke did not know about essence and substance, Edwards was ready to ascribe to God – and he was ready to do so in terms that either combined the use of ‘substance’ and relational dispositions or simply employed the latter (e.g. matter). He was also ready to blame the deficiencies of Locke’s ontology on the empiricist’s positivism and nominalism.<sup>127</sup> For Edwards, dispositional concepts offered a plausible and coherent alternative to understanding perceived reality because they deferred the origination, continuation, and termination of all existence and causality to God.

Dispositions, then, were not only essential for Edwards’ characterization of the world, they also served as an important feature in his metaphysical theory of being:<sup>128</sup> ‘[The soul’s] essence consists in powers and habits’.<sup>129</sup> Dispositions were no nominalistic device, they were

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<sup>125</sup> Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 22-25. This statement, of course, could be extended to include Calvin (see, *Institutes*, I.14.17; III.3.7, 8). While at Yale, JE would have encountered a variety of ideas concerned with ‘habit’ and ‘disposition’ in Dummer’s philosophical and theological literature.

<sup>126</sup> E.g. Heereboord, *Ἐρμηνεία Logica* (London, 1658), *passim*.

<sup>127</sup> Locke, while continuing to speak of essences, distinguished between real and nominal essences. For him, the familiar objects of common sense are collections of copresent sensible ideas to which we attach a single name like ‘tree’ or ‘man’ or ‘flower.’ Identifying the ideas constitutive of the relevant collections gives us the nominal essence of a tree, man, or flower. He did not deny that real essences might underlie such collections, but he insisted that it is nominal rather than real essences to which we have epistemic access. Essence, therefore, does not equal subsistence in Locke. JE’s rejection of the Lockean account of spirit, mind, and matter, is indicated in ‘The Mind’ 11 (c.1724) and ‘M’267 (1726), but becomes explicit in ‘The Mind’ 70-72 (1748) in connection with personal identity. See Anderson’s discussion on JE’s various points of disagreement with Locke in ‘EI’, *Works*6, 101-02, 112-17, 128-31.

<sup>128</sup> I say this mindful of JE’s provisos about God’s being. Locke, it has been observed, had difficulties with the notion of habit, concluding that mental habits or dispositions were settled by ‘custom’ (*Essay*, bk. II, 33, 5-6; cf. Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 25-32). Thus, the scope of the epistemic function of habit (indeed, if there is one for Locke) is limited only to the aberrational connections among ideas, where habits possess no ontological status.

<sup>129</sup> ‘M’241, *Works*13, 358.



real; their structural components—*relations*—were universals; and relational dispositions constituted the essential structure of reality.<sup>130</sup>

Lee additionally explains that it was Edwards' realist reconception of an original Aristotelian concept of *hexis* (and later, Aquinas' idea of *habitus*) that made his metaphysical reformulation of reality possible.<sup>131</sup> But this is not to say that Edwards was a metaphysical, direct, or representative realist. Where, on the one hand, metaphysical realism represents the view that there are 'real' objects (usually spatiotemporal objects) that exist independently of our experience or our knowledge of them, and have properties and enter into relations independently of the concepts with which we understand them, Edwards, on the other hand, ardently holds to an anti-realist idealism with respect to the creation. That is, with respect to the real existence of abstract ideas Edwards is Platonistic: there is, for example, real beauty without created perceiving minds. But with respect to the phenomenal world, Edwards is a thorough going idealist.<sup>132</sup>

Yet, with that said, Lee points out that there is a sense in which dispositional laws have a mode of 'reality' without being perceived by minds. He claims their reality is not by name but as ontologically real potentialities that are 'a distinguishable reality not only from human minds but also from God as well.'<sup>133</sup> He goes on to say that, while at first Edwards held that such a reality was in the divine consciousness, he quickly abandoned this idea to make a distinction not only between the 'eternal existence' of things in God's consciousness and their temporal existence via human minds, but between dispositions existing as objects and ideas:

The created world abides as a system of the permanently fixed general laws or tendencies that God has established and according to which he causes actual existences (actual ideas) in time and space. The world, therefore, exists abidingly in the mode of *virtuality* or *real possibility* that is a midpoint between pure potentiality and full actuality.<sup>134</sup>

Lee, however, has been incautious on three counts: by not strictly identifying such 'actual existences' with ideas of divine power; by not explicitly stating that the source of such realism for Edwards lies in the disposition's peculiar mode of existence *in the divine mind*; and, by not strictly identifying the 'midpoint' as the divine power, which moves a thing from a 'before' existence to an 'after' existence in terms of temporal progression. In Edwards,

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<sup>130</sup> Anderson, 'EI', *Works* 6, 83; cf. Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 78.

<sup>131</sup> *Philosophical Theology*, 10-25.

<sup>132</sup> Indeed, this holds for JE because God exists with all of His perfections *ens a se*. It is only with respect to God manifesting and replicating His attributes in *this* realm that they must be perceived to be (*ad extra*). JE always assumes God (as in his '*M*') and any universals—e.g. relations—to be *in* God.

If space permitted, we might draw out the correspondence between Berkeley and JE respecting their reaction to Lockean representative realism. Suffice it to say that Berkeley's attack on Locke's 'general *abstract* ideas' as *real* things, an attack that argued that we cannot have any empirical verification of Lockean 'general abstract ideas', paralleled JE's attempt to turn from 'these empty abstractions' (Berkeley) to account for the actual *conditions* under which we predicate existence.

<sup>133</sup> 'Edwards on God and Nature' in *Edwards in Our Time*, 28.

<sup>134</sup> *Philosophical Theology*, 63.



dispositions' relation to God is understood in the following ways: (1) their applications are the 'immediate' exercising of God's power (corresponding with Edwards' occasionalism); (2) inasmuch as God's power cannot be conceived of something foreign to His peculiar essence, then even those dispositions are, in some sense, of and in God Himself *as an idea* of how His power would be exercised with respect to the world; and, (3) the source of their abiding 'reality' (prior to an actual manifestation/application) lies in their enduring in the divine mind.

In Edwards' system such dispositions themselves are ideas. Lee's proposal would have lawlike 'realities' maintaining an existence external to the divine mind without their being perceived by other minds corresponding to *that* external existence. Which is to say, certain lawlike dispositions possess a 'reality' independent of the parameters of Edwards' idealism (where things 'can exist nowhere else but in the mind, either infinite or finite').<sup>135</sup>

Yet, Lee is not entirely off the mark, for just as I have indicated, Edwards indeed holds that dispositions are abiding principles. As Anri Morimoto points out, Edwards makes an important modification to his earliest expression of idealism by qualifying the 'reality' of certain ideas and laws as they pertain to *this* world. Things or objects (which Edwards equates with ideas) are in the *temporal realm* only when perceived by created minds or by their relational connection to other perceived ideas.<sup>136</sup> For Edwards, the idea of the existence of things in spatio-temporality is nothing other than an idea communicated from God to *IPMs*:

[The] truth as to external things, is the consistency of our ideas with those ideas, or that train and series of ideas, that are raised in our minds according to God's stated order and law.

For,

Man, or intelligent beings, are the consciousness of creation, whereby the universe is conscious of its own being, of what is done in it of the actions of the Creator and Governor with respect to it.<sup>137</sup>

The point toward which Edwards is moving holds that the *idea* of 'external things' and the laws that govern them have a certain mode of reality before (even beyond) their existence in created minds. Ontologically speaking, the laws that govern the particulars of a given entity *x* have a particular mode of existence without the perception of an *IPM*. However, this is not to say, as Morimoto does, that Edwards has left behind his idealist or immaterialist position. Rather, it has become *more* idealistic, as his causality becomes more occasionalistic. Though divinely constituted laws are prior to perception, yet unless there is an intelligent perceiver

<sup>135</sup> 'Of Being', *Works*6, 206. Dispositions do not determine God's idea of Himself, but vice versa.

<sup>136</sup> '*M'pp*, 94, 238, 239, *Works*13.

<sup>137</sup> 'The Mind' 10, *Works*6, 342; '*M*'1, *Works*13, 197. Elsewhere, he uses the terms 'perception' instead of consciousness to express the same point. The term 'perception' may have been more favorable because it could stand for both having empirical contact with physical phenomena and having an idea of spiritual as well as physical things. Although in '*M*'3, 87, and 354, for example, JE uses the designation 'intelligent beings' (which could be interpreted as something broader than human beings, e.g. angels), '*M*'gg, 1, 104, 108, and 114, clearly show that human beings are intended by that designation to be 'the consciousness or perception of the creation' ('*M*'104). I discuss the reason for this in Chapter III.



*within* the realm in which those laws have their tendency, they will not have the occasion to be, as it were, in that domain. In God's determination of values they had 'as good not be as be' without perceivers. The way that they become phenomenologically 'real' or conceptually present is through God's communication of the idea of those laws or dispositions *in* some *IPM*.<sup>138</sup> But the presence of some mind does not *cause* God's idea to be communicated or anything else for that matter. No relation or connection causes or stimulates occurrences. Instead, God Himself brings about particular results. The arrangements upon those occasions are simply a matter of some 'fitness', determined by God's infinitely wise arbitration. Yet, laws and rules that God determines govern the particular non-causal connections and their corresponding results. The divine power to effect results constitutes the midpoint between cause and effect – a lawlike disposition or tendency toward some particular effect.

While Edwards understands that a disposition has a mode of ontological existence independent of *IPMs*, yet it is only as a certain *idea* of God's power. An abiding dispositional law (that is, one that has *not* been communicated to a created intelligence) does not have a quasi-independent metaphysical reality apart from the divine mind and neither does it consist of something other than God's power; a point which Lee himself admits. Rather, prior to the creation of angelic or human minds, they abide only as a certain determination *in* the divine mind and, even after the temporal presence of *IPMs*, they are entirely dependent upon God to conceive continuously of them as such, as well as communicate the idea of His power manifested in a particular way (as a thing or event).

Their 'abiding' existence, then, lies in the notion that they continue as lawlike ideas of how God's power will be exercised when those ideas—in the divine mind—are communicated to other minds. When the divine idea of any thing is communicated to an *IPM* it becomes, as it were, concretely 'real' to *that* mind; that is, the idea of that thing gains a phenomenological or conceptual realness to/in that created mind and may be deemed an '*ad extra*' manifestation of divine power or beauty or being.<sup>139</sup> Thus, it is in the sense that the source of such realism for Edwards lies in the dispositions' peculiar mode of existence (an idea) abiding in God's mind, that he can be considered a realist with regard to dispositions.

## **2.b. Divine Reality and Perceived Reality**

There are two ways to talk about 'reality' in Edwards. First, there is reality in the divine mind, where, 'Things as to God exist from all eternity alike.' So, if one wishes to speak about the unmanifested ontological reality of dispositions or the world, then one must understand their reality 'established' as a complete 'series' in the divine mind. Second, there is reality that pertains to perceiving finite minds. 'Real', 'reality', and 'actual' in this latter sense refers to

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<sup>138</sup> 'The Mind' 69, *Works6*, 385.

<sup>139</sup> *Works6*, 215.



the created mind's perception (reception) of God's communicated idea of a thing's (i.e. the exercise of His power in a particular fashion to produce the effect of that thing) or the world's reality in His own mind (where it is real as an unchangeable idea). Consider Edwards' differentiation between these realities and his explanation of how they come together:

Though we suppose that the existence of the whole material universe is absolutely dependent on idea, yet we may speak in the old way, and as properly and truly as ever: God in the beginning created such a certain number of atoms, of such a determinate bulk and figure, which they yet maintain and always will; and gave them such a motion of such a direction, and of such a degree of velocity; in a continued series. *Yet all this does not exist anywhere perfectly but in the divine mind.* But then, if it be inquired what exists in the divine mind, and how these things exist there, I answer: there is his determination, his care and his design that *ideas* shall be united forever, just so and in such a manner as is agreeable *to such a series.*

He continues by giving instance to this contention, and closes by stating his conclusion:

All the ideas that ever were or ever shall be to all eternity, in any created mind, are answerable to the existence of such a peculiar atom in the beginning of creation, of such a determinate figure and size, and have such a motion given it. That is, they are all such as infinite wisdom sees would follow, according to the series of nature, from such an atom so moved. That is, all ideal changes of creatures are just so, as if just such a particular atom had actually all along existed even in some finite mind, and never had been out of that mind, and had in that mind caused these effects which are exactly according to nature, that is, according to the nature of other matter that is actually perceived by the mind. God supposes its existence; that is, he causes all changes to arise as if all these things had actually existed in such a series in some created mind, and as if created minds had comprehended all things perfectly. And although created minds do not, yet the divine mind doth, and he orders all things according to his mind, and his ideas.<sup>140</sup>

The perception of 'reality' or a thing perceived as conceptually or phenomenologically 'real' or 'actual' is a consequence of an *IPM*'s consciousness of the Divine Being's idea about reality or that thing; it is the 'truth' or the experience of reality agreeable to the divine mind. The appearance of change or permanence lies in the presentation of the divine series in/to perceiving minds.<sup>141</sup> To the perceiver, that *communicated* series *is* their reality. To God, reality's mode and prescribed content never changes: it consists in a perfect idea of a communicated and remanated 'series' of ideas.

In Edwards' theocentric metaphysics, the created mind's perception of a thing—the idea of that thing in God's mind which He conceives of as communicated to that mind—is, in effect, the creature becoming conscious of 'Being in general' or, more precisely, being-as-manifest. Reverting to our previous discussion, Edwards' realism must be understood in terms of *degrees of coherence*: his is no correspondence theory of truth or reality, for the belief that instance *p* is true if and only if *p* cannot obtain verification without an ontological basis (God), which connects all instances *p* to an entire system that is consistent and harmonious – Being in general. The universal of relations, then, must be understood as a sort of pattern or blueprint that exist in the mind of God, where they are real and where dispositions (in their

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<sup>140</sup> 'The Mind' 34, *Works*6, 353-54. Italics mine.

<sup>141</sup> 'M' 134, *Works*13, 295.



relational constitution) have, as it were, a prior ontological reality. The totality of their reality in the divine mind is perceived by created intelligent minds in degrees: God either expanding or contracting their relationally determined perspective of a single system of reality – Being in general itself – as God determines to communicate. This perceived reality (communicated by God) is the reality of created minds, no matter what degree of it they perceive.<sup>142</sup>

If we consider this in connection with Edwards' 'scale of being' we get an idea of how 'value' and 'substantiality of being' are estimated: the greater the degree of a created mind's perception of ideas communicated from the divine mind, the more that created being is conscious of 'Being in general', and therefore the more 'consent to being' it exercises and, ontologically speaking, possesses. The more consent to being, the more excellency: the more excellency the more like God it becomes, and therefore the more real or substantial. Conversely, the opposite holds for material entities.<sup>143</sup>

### ***2.c. Dispositions, Causal Occurrences, and the Existence of the World***

What distinguishes Edwards' theory of dispositions in connection with causality from those of select contemporary physical and psychophysical theorists who employ dispositional concepts, are two qualified things: (1) the ontological reality of dispositions apart from circumstantial manifestation; and (2) the reality of dispositions whether or not they are observed by created minds, as indicated in §2.a. As stated, Lee would have no difficulty with (1) and (2), for he asserts as much in his own writings.<sup>144</sup> However, important qualifiers must be added. Both (1) and (2) are qualified by Edwards' idealism and occasionalism in that they limit the 'perceived reality' of unmanifested dispositions to a 'virtual' status (a mid-point between cause and effect which Edwards denominates 'power'), and ultimately resolve both the disposition and its manifestation to ideas of God's power and beauty—an arrangement determined and effected by God.<sup>145</sup> (Hence, the ultimate source of their reality lies in God's idea of Himself or, synonymously, His essence.)

In a counterfactual argument, Edwards says dispositions permanently exist in a particular state, whether they are expressed or observed or not:

In memory, in mental principles, habits, and inclinations, there is something really abiding in the mind when there are no acts or exercises of them, much in the same manner as there is a chair, in this room when none perceives it, we mean that the minds would perceive chairs here according to the law of nature in such circumstances. So when we say, a person has these and those things laid up in his memory, we mean they would actually be repeated in his mind upon certain occasions, according to the law of nature....<sup>146</sup>

<sup>142</sup> Here we can see plainly how JE departs from Locke. Ideas are 'excited' in us by God, rather than by external bodies acting upon our organs of sense.

<sup>143</sup> 'The Mind' 1 and 45, *Works*6, 335-36, 362-64.

<sup>144</sup> Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 42-48.

<sup>145</sup> 'The Mind' 29, *Works*6, 352. See 'M' 553, 729, 1337, where JE uses the words 'virtual', 'virtually', 'actual', 'potential', and 'mere possibility' in this connection.

<sup>146</sup> 'The Mind' 69, *Works*6, 385.



By asserting that the ‘laws of nature’ (‘which God hath fixed’) do not solely rest in the sphere of epistemology but also ontology (‘there is something really abiding’), Edwards underscores a critical facet of his account of dispositions. As he describes it, ontology is the foundation of epistemology, it sets epistemic limits: the science of knowledge is not separate from the question of existence.<sup>147</sup> Dispositions are more than occurrent; they possess a mode of reality independent of perceived events *as* general laws that govern the manner or character of actual existences, actions, and events, through which they gain external acknowledgement – and here is the critical part – *only when those ideas of manifestation that abide in the divine mind are communicated*.<sup>148</sup>

So, while Edwards rejects the epistemological theory that the attribution of dispositions is the consequence of such and such occasion, stimulus, or circumstance, due to his belief in the ontological basis of dispositions in the divine mind, he nevertheless maintains that such and such a disposition *certainly will* demonstrate its tendency upon given conditions: ‘All habits [are] only a law that God has fixed, that such actions upon such occasions should be exerted’.<sup>149</sup> Significantly, however, the certainty of expression, inevitableness, or necessity of disposition’s manifestation upon certain conditions lies in its being fashioned as an active tendency and connection within a *divinely determined series*.<sup>150</sup> Clearly, however, the ‘power’ in the dispositions activity is God’s power. Strictly speaking, dispositions themselves are not causes; God exerting His power is the cause. God’s power supplies the causal force within/of a disposition. Again, the accent is on divine intentionality: the antecedent to that power is God’s determination, His sufficient reason why something should be. Thus, God’s sufficient reason supplies the philosophical necessity of the series’ apparent causal connection or necessary aetiological relationship. A lawlike disposition is, then, the way that God determines how His power will be particularly exerted. This forms the basis of Edwards’ occasionalism and basically accounts for how occurrences take place. The status of Edwards’ dispositions are certain through the grounding of occurrences in (1) the lawlikeness of dispositions, where the laws are God’s ‘natural operation’ (as opposed to arbitrary); the causal force or power they govern is God’s power; (2) their ‘prior’ existence as a ‘train or series of ideas ... according to God’s stated order or law’; and (3) supremely, the philosophical necessity of sufficient reason. These dispositional laws ensure that occurrences will take place not only because they govern the way God’s power is exercised toward resulting phenomena

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<sup>147</sup> Elwood, *PTJE*, 12.

<sup>148</sup> ‘The Mind’ 40, *Works6*, 357. Indeed, as Anderson confirms: ‘Nothing is more apparent in [JE’s] theory of supposed existence than that Edwards conceives of general laws of nature to be ontologically prior to the objects of the world’ (‘EI’, *Works6*, 109).

<sup>149</sup> ‘M’ 241, *Works13*, 358.

<sup>150</sup> It is not unlikely that JE acquired this notion of ‘active principles’ from Newton. Lee pursues this thought in *Philosophical Theology*, 31-34. It may be, however, that JE simply deduced the notion of ‘active principles’ from the telic orientation of created existences.



(mental or otherwise), but also because they are ‘real’ ontological principles in the divine mind, and have their place within a completed series of exercises – ‘as to God’.

As we noted in the preceding section, the idea of manifest reality in God’s mind consists of a determined ‘series of ideas’. When viewed as a whole, the series is the universe or world, the matrix of reality, God ‘*ad extra*’. When viewed characteristically, the series is a network of lawlike dispositions regulating God’s power toward specific exertions. The way the series achieves ‘*ad extra*’ manifestation is through a divinely determined occasionalistic scheme.<sup>151</sup>

Though having its origins in Malebranche,<sup>152</sup> Edwards’ own unique brand of occasionalism is a two-fold doctrine, emphasized in one of two ways: idealistically or concerning the phenomena of causal occurrences. The first part of his two-fold doctrine pertains to his ‘idealistic occasionalism,’ to which I have referred earlier. Within this larger and overarching set, God utilizes perceiving minds to produce the effect of Himself communicated – the matrix of reality, being-as-manifest. The arrangement is one of God emanating and remanating ideas to/from perceiving minds. Subsumed within the first part, is the second, which assumes the idea of an initially manifested world and takes note of causal occurrences therein. To be sure, God is the causal power in both.

Within Edwards’ idealistic occasionalism the ideas of why God created the world and how He effects its initial achievement come together. God’s end is to glorify and replicate Himself ‘*ad extra*’: perceiving minds provide the occasion, not out of absolute or natural or causal necessity, but because God determines it so: ‘[T]he creatures are made that God may in them have occasion to fulfill his pleasure in manifesting and communicating himself.’<sup>153</sup> God in His own wisdom determines that without perceiving minds, the world would be valueless (Edwards’ weak necessitarian view.) Therefore, God prescribes *IPMs* a role, not as causal agents, but as a condition in His scheme. Their ‘necessary’ role in God’s arrangement (why God ‘needs’ them) concerns the world’s value to God. Again, this is a question of philosophical necessity or moral necessity as opposed to natural necessity – God’s arbitration stands supreme. They provide ‘minds’ by which God may have His idea of Himself ‘*ad extra*’ ‘remanated’ back to Him.<sup>154</sup>

How does Edwards know that dispositional laws pertaining to occasionalistic causality abide in the divine mind? He answers, ‘’Tis discover’d in the Constancy of the Laws of

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<sup>151</sup> Occasionalism is the doctrine that finite creating beings have no causal efficacy and that God alone is a true causal agent. Occasionalism is regularly analyzed as a modern philosophical movement, which originated as an outgrowth of the Cartesian doctrine of the relation between body and mind, though, more precisely, occasionalism was championed by the likes of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111) and Gabriel Giel (1420-95) long before the Enlightenment responses to Descartes. The term itself, the *Oxford English Dictionary* states, arose in 1842.

<sup>152</sup> Indeed, not only did Malebranche’s occasionalism and theory of ideas influence JE, but also Berkeley and Hume.

<sup>153</sup> *M*448, *Works*13, 495.

<sup>154</sup> *Works*8, 531.



nature.’<sup>155</sup> As a follow up question one might ask, ‘If general laws or dispositions are not exercised, what then is their status of existence when in a state of inactivity?’ Again, the answer is that they are a completed series in God’s mind; they only are perceived in or as a temporal series by created minds. The ‘virtual’ status of unmanifested dispositions pertains more to the created mind than to the divine mind.<sup>156</sup> For God, the movement from ‘virtuality’ to communicated ‘reality’ is meaningless – the idea ‘is always the same and after the same mode’. God knows ‘real’ only one way: hence His timelessness and changelessness and perfection. The creature, however, remains subject to a linear or chronological progression of existence, where things become ‘real’ or ‘actual’ in their minds.

When Edwards discusses things from the perspective of the creature he speaks from within the framework of a linear progression of temporal series, that is, *sub specie temporis* (v.i. Chapter III, §3.c.i). Thus, in his causal theory a cause is that ‘after or upon the existence of which, or the exercise of it after such a manner, the existence of another thing follows’ (as opposed to his axiomatic aetiological foundation: a ‘cause’ is God’s sufficient reason for something to be).<sup>157</sup> What connects the idea of a prior existence to that ‘after’ existence is ‘power’: ‘The connection between these two existences [past and present], or between the cause and effect, is what we call power.’<sup>158</sup>

Laws also explain how God resolves to communicate ideas of perceived reality to minds, and what the power of (His) laws tends toward. Which means that, the operation of God, or the exercise of His mind concerning creation, is lawlike, so that ‘the immediate agency, will, and power of God,’ or the cause, is God, answerable to His lawlike effect.

[It] should be remembered, what nature is, in created things: and what the established course of nature is; that ... it is nothing, separate from the agency of God.... A father, according to the course of nature, begets a child; an oak [likewise] ... produces an acorn, or a bud; so according to the law of nature, the former existence of the trunk of the tree is followed by its new or present existence. In the one case, and the other, the new effect is consequent on the former, only by the established laws, and settled course of nature; which is allowed to be nothing but the continued immediate efficiency of God, according to a constitution that he has been pleased to establish.<sup>159</sup>

It is through and in such laws that God exercises His power with regard to the created order: ‘God is pleased to act by Rules which he fixes, thus the Law of nature—the Laws by which natural effects are produced.’<sup>160</sup> The immediacy of God’s activity is not removed

<sup>155</sup> Num. 23:19 (1743). Cf. *Works3*, 126 and ‘M’241, *Works13*, 358.

<sup>156</sup> Thus, when JE says that ‘God supposes [a thing’s] existence’, he is not saying that ‘virtual’, ‘potential’, and ‘mere possible’ realities are real states of consciousness for God about things. Rather, God supposing the existence of a thing is His determination of the series of that thing’s perceived reality *from* the perspective of a created mind. ‘Suppose’ and ‘virtual’ are temporal referents. See Anderson’s discussion on whether ideas can exist without being perceived in which he examines JE’s theory of ‘supposed’ existences ordained by God, in ‘EI’, *Works6*, 107-08.

<sup>157</sup> ‘The Mind’ 26, *Works6*, 350.

<sup>158</sup> ‘The Mind’ 29, *Works6*, 352.

<sup>159</sup> *Works3*, 401. Cf. *Works6*, 234.

<sup>160</sup> Num. 23:19 (1743); ‘M’1263, *PJE*, 193.



though laws are used. This, of course, is consistent with standard definitions of occasionalism, in which *ipso facto* laws cannot be causal, but they can be divine regularities at the creaturely level of observation. Thus, it is through laws, which govern *divine causal powers*, that God effects the result of created reality.<sup>161</sup>

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Edwards' specific qualifications to occasionalism accommodate and do not extinguish the permanent nature of the laws constitutive of fully actualized spatiotemporal existences. The Edwardsean tendency that created entities are each moment the effect of God's immediate agency is upheld. For him, general laws *are* 'the immediate exercise of divine power', not concurrent causes. If there is something that 'permanently abides in the mind' even when there is no effect, then it is God's power. If it is manifest, that is, communicated to perceiving minds, then it is His beauty and their reality. Thus, the objectivity of the world has a divine, not a physical or creaturely reference, though its temporal reference becomes objectified when there is 'the consistency and agreement of our ideas with the ideas of God.'<sup>162</sup>

When Edwards refers in his aetiology to dispositions or habits, he means active and real tendencies, not merely conventions or even a Humean 'general regularities', because of their place within a series or a network, or, in other words, because of their *relation* to the whole series of ideas concerning the reality to be communicated to perceiving minds.<sup>163</sup> In this way, Edwards' occasionalism stands akin to the ontological status of Malebranche's ideas.<sup>164</sup>

Quoting again from 'M'241, Edwards says, 'All habits [are] a law that God has fixed, that such actions upon such occasions should be exerted.' 'Should' is not to be understood as 'could' but really as 'would,' even 'certainly would.' For Edwards, an active tendency to a kind of phenomenological event will actually bring about such an event whenever a certain divinely prescribed set of conditions within the series is present.<sup>165</sup> Failure of occurrence simply is not possible, due to any given disposition or thing's status within a 'series'. Dispositions then function with a kind of conditional necessity, in which God moves an event associated with a certain dispositional manifestation from its status within the divine series to 'actual' occurrence or phenomenologically or mentally 'real' with respect to created minds.

What actually 'triggers' the actual application of a disposition is a 'a full, fixed, and certain connection.'<sup>166</sup> 'Philosophical necessity,' Edwards says, 'is really nothing else than a

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<sup>161</sup> 'M'629, *Works*18, 157-58.

<sup>162</sup> 'The Mind' 10, *Works*6, 341-42.

<sup>163</sup> Ramsey, 'EI', *Works*1, 35, 118.

<sup>164</sup> McCracken (*Malebranche and British Philosophy*) and Fiering ('The Rationalistic Foundations of JE' in *American Experience*, 73-101) have shown several striking parallels between JE and Malebranche. For instance, both taught that God is 'Being in general', the world is an ideal one, and God is the only and immediate cause. Cf. Cook, 'The Ontological Status of Malebranchian Ideas', 525-44; Nadler, *Malebranche and Ideas*.

<sup>165</sup> Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 35.

<sup>166</sup> Miller (*Jonathan Edwards*, 121-22) and Heimert (*Religion and the American Mind from the Great Awakening to the Revolution*, 73) have emphasized JE's opposition to the notion of an efficient cause.



full and fixed connection.’ Necessity therefore lies in a particular *connection* with certain divinely prescribed conditions.<sup>167</sup> It is the connection within the divine series itself that assures that necessity is ‘nothing different from certainty.’ The active tendency of disposition is necessitated by its connection with certain conditions, a *law of relation*, which *God* establishes. Thus by equating *causa sine qua non* with ‘occasional cause’, as Edwards does for instance in *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival* (Boston, 1742),<sup>168</sup> he was referring to the finite conditions without which a particular event could not occur, at least in the way it usually does. While conditions may be necessary to the event, they are never sufficient of themselves to produce it or to determine its essential nature; and, in the words of C.C. Goen, ‘that is why one cannot argue the nature of the cause from the nature of the effect, or vice versa.’<sup>169</sup> God alone is ‘true cause’, and God alone establishes the philosophical necessity of the relations between conditions, causes, and effects – according to His ‘sufficient reason.’

This is a thesis Edwards inflates and applies to the whole of reality. Not just epiphenomenal occurrences, but the very existence of the whole phenomenal world is the moment-to-moment effect of God’s causal efficiency, which, by divine sufficient reason, possesses lawlike characteristics. Only when understood in this context may dispositions or habits may be designated causes, that is, in the sense that, by divine sufficient reason, certain conditions and connections yield certain manifestations of God’s power. Thus, dispositions function with a kind of necessity within the divine series to bringing about a type of event or operation under a type of circumstances. These circumstances, which include the ideas of time, locale, and prescribed variable or variables, ascribe individuality, particularity, or identity to events and things.

Disposition, then, is an active, relationally connected causal power, triggered by God, to bring about events of a particular sort. The relational connection of a particular disposition links it with all other ideas in a single, comprehensive series in God’s mind. Consequently, what are understood to be past, present, and future events or existences, are connected as a network, matrix. The series of created existences, as a whole, is one and abides in God’s mind,<sup>170</sup> though it is made up of innumerable series of instances.

The priority of God in Edwards’ system means that it is God who constitutes how laws exist and in what manner they are communicated or fully realized as actual ideas to perceiving

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<sup>167</sup> *Works1*, 152, 156. For a discussion on JE’s distinction between ‘moral and natural necessity,’ see Ramsey, ‘EI’, *Works1*, 34-37.

<sup>168</sup> *Works4*, 316.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, ‘EI’, 67.

<sup>170</sup> God’s knowledge is an important topic in *FW* and several ‘*M*’ entries. JE never doubts the eternal completeness of God’s perfect knowledge. It is upon this supposition that he strenuously argues against Arminian ‘contingency’ theories. See *Works1*, 257-73; and ‘*M*’ 1154 in *PJE*, 180.



intelligent minds. Both metaphysics and physics emerge out of the ‘necessary being’ and the ‘natural operations’ of God.<sup>171</sup>

While Locke and Berkeley took the concept of causality on trust, we find that Edwards, like Hume, did not. Furthermore, Edwards’ theory of causation cannot be acquainted with Thomas Reid, who took the existence of things for granted and which were directly acquainted with the agent through their senses. Edwards, however, understood causal relations within a larger idealistic phenomenological framework, grounded in the will, power and being of God.

## **2.d The Activity of Resistance**

In Edwards’ first engagement with Enlightenment religion we find him countering the materialists’ purge of the independent reality of intelligent voluntary spirits, ‘and so, by implication, the independent reality of an omniscient, omnipotent, and beneficent being’<sup>172</sup> by nullifying the material ‘substance’ of matter within the essay ‘Of Atoms’. Shortly thereafter he adds to his reasoning that, if God was ‘*Ens Entium*’ and present with the universe itself, then the possibility of there being competing substances (such that Newtonian physics proposed) with the ‘substance’ of God was implausible. To him, even the least molecule outside of the immediate controlling power of God jeopardized divine sovereignty and compromised the doctrine of God’s comprehensiveness. Therefore he countered with a critical analysis of solidity or ‘resistance’, which was counted as a universal and essential property of matter, and concluded that this infinite power of resistance could not reside in an underlying substance, but rather must be a constant exercise of the infinite power of God. Far from being undiscoverable by logical analysis, God alone is ‘substance’ while matter is the immediate effect of the exercise of the infinite power of God.<sup>173</sup>

‘Resistance’ itself came to rest on dispositional principles and came to play an important role in Edwards’ explanation of phenomenal reality. Indeed, the principles of the early composition ‘Of Atoms’ were never abandoned; instead, they were brought into harmony with his developing idealism and philosophy of dispositions.

As we noted earlier, existing for Edwards occurs only in accord with general laws. The logic of which meant that laws not only constitute the abiding dimension of an entity as a disposition, but also determine the manner of its existence. Existence, as Lee explains, is in a *particular manner* – in the particular way a particular divinely established general law requires.<sup>174</sup> Laws, then, are the abiding principles of the structure and order of reality.

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<sup>171</sup> This statement might lead into a discussion of JE’s doctrine of providence, in which he distinguishes between God’s ‘arbitrary’ and ‘natural’ operations, but I defer to Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 68-75.

<sup>172</sup> Anderson, ‘EI’, *Works*6, 54.

<sup>173</sup> ‘Of Atoms’ [Prop.2, corol.3, 11], *Works*6, 214, 215.

<sup>174</sup> Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 40.



‘Therefore,’ Edwards says, ‘we may infallibly conclude that the very being, and the manner of being, and the whole of bodies depends immediately on the divine *power* [or Being],’ who causes ‘indefinite resistance in that place where it is’ according to fixed laws.<sup>175</sup> Thus, material bodies themselves exist in a particular manner—*resisting*—according to the demand of a particular divinely established law, or the divine being exerting power in a lawlike manner.<sup>176</sup> For Edwards, the question of material bodies is not so much *what* exists but *how*.

The concept of ‘resistance’, which appears in Edwards’ explanatory corollaries to his propositions on the being of entities, is an essential part of his ‘idealistic phenomenalism’<sup>177</sup> response to the materialism of Hobbes, as well as the undiscoverable ‘substances’ of Newton and Locke. In opposition to the materialism of Hobbes,<sup>178</sup> his main point is that ‘the very existence’ of bodies depends immediately upon the exercise of God’s infinite power, and that bodies do not exist by themselves as substances.<sup>179</sup> Instead, the material world ‘can exist nowhere else but in the mind, either infinite or finite,’ or again, ‘corporeal things exist no otherwise than mentally, either in created or uncreated consciousness.’<sup>180</sup> According to Edwards, then, a material entity is not Locke’s ‘something, I know not what’,<sup>181</sup> or a subject to which solidity or the activity of resisting inheres, but rather a body is solidity—resistance from annihilation itself. For a body to be is for there to be resistance of a certain kind at a given time and place. Resistance or the extension and cohesion of bodies is the activity of God’s infinite power, for only God can offer the power necessary to resist annihilation. Consequently, material bodies are not substances that exist independently, but ‘the Deity acting in that particular manner in those parts of space where he thinks fit.’<sup>182</sup> By removing the ‘material’ substance from materialism, Edwards makes sense of his seemingly paradoxical

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<sup>175</sup> *Works6*, 235, 215.

<sup>176</sup> JE’s theory of resistance borrows heavily from More’s *The Immortality of the Soul*, in which More presents his concept of the ‘indiscernible’ parts of an atom, as well as the more general conclusions regards God’s infinite power in the activity of resistance.

<sup>177</sup> Anderson, ‘EI’, *Works6*, 53.

<sup>178</sup> In ‘Natural Philosophy’ No.26, JE reveals his understanding of Hobbes’ materialism, when he reminds himself ‘to being in an observation somewhere in a proper place, that instead of Hobbes’ notion that God is matter, and that all substance is matter, that nothing that is matter can possibly be God, and that no matter is, in the most proper sense, matter’ (*Works6*, 235).

<sup>179</sup> ‘Of Atoms’ [Prop.2], *Works6*, 213-16, corols.1-16.

<sup>180</sup> ‘Natural Philosophy’, *Works6*, 186-87; ‘The Mind’ 10, *Works6*, 342. Despite JE’s 1753 confession: ‘it happens I never read Mr. Hobbes’ (*Works1*, 374), ‘Natural Philosophy’ indicates that he at least came across excerpts or summations of Hobbes’ philosophy through critical secondary sources such as Henry more and the theistic followers of Isaac Newton.

<sup>181</sup> JE picks up where Locke and Newton were unsure what the substance that supports the properties of bodies might be: ‘it follows that the opinion that philosophers used to have concerning a certain unknown substance, which they used to say it was impossible for a man to have an idea of, is nothing at all distinct from solidity itself; or, if they must needs apply that word to something else that does really and properly subsist by itself and support all properties, they must apply it to the Divine Being or power itself’ (*Works6*, 215).

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 214-15.



statement, ‘No matter is, in the most proper sense, matter.’<sup>183</sup> In general, however, his idealist-phenomenalistic view of the physical universe retained and emphasized its character as a Newtonian system of physics.<sup>184</sup> But Edwards boldly asserted that it was God behind the arrangement, not just in terms of its order, but also its manifestation. The order or arrangement of the physical universe came down to God’s wisdom and will – Newton would have agreed with this. Yet Edwards went further. That arrangement itself was insufficient to persist from one moment to the next. God’s immediate power was necessary to perpetuate even the laws of nature as a phenomenological reality.

So, then, there are three important things to note here: First, in accord with preceding sections, the meaning of *material* substance has changed for Edwards from a medieval to a modern conception;<sup>185</sup> second, the activity of resistance itself *is* existence or being of bodies or bodies themselves; and third, the resistance activities caused by God are divinely established laws or, in other words, God’s power exercised in a lawlike dispositional fashion.

This had the effect of rendering the entire phenomenal/material universe dependent upon God each and every moment and thereby nullifying the materialist proposal of the universe as a ‘complete, autonomous, and self-sustaining system of unthinking bodies that are subject only to inherent, necessary, and mathematically exact laws of mechanical causation.’<sup>186</sup> Like Hobbes, Edwards asserted that every element of the phenomenal universe was determined. Unlike Hobbes, Edwards said it was God, a spiritual being, who determined and effected every element of the phenomenal universe.

Thus, ‘Material substance’ is reduced to the activity of resistance, or is dismissed altogether with reference to bodies. So that, if one were to speak of material substance as it appears in Edwards’ scheme after mid-1722, one ought not to be speaking about the Aristotelian-Scholastic tradition of the ultimate underlying ‘stuff’ or *concreta* which theoretically composed the ‘what-ness’ of bodies. Edwards understands God’s power—manifested in/with a lawlike dispositional regularity—to be the ‘substance’ of bodies: ‘speaking most strictly, there is no proper substance but God’ (‘Of Atoms’). For Edwards, this was a more sure way to deal with the materialists than the classical dualist or Cartesian distinction between material and non-material substances. The main point of Edwards’ response to materialism assured that the ‘very existence’ of bodies depends immediately upon

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<sup>183</sup> *Works6*, 235. Cf. Wainwright, ‘Jonathan Edwards, Atoms, and Immaterialism’, 79-89. The difference between the approaches toward the materialist problem by Berkeley and JE are reduced acceptability to the following statement by Anderson: ‘Berkeley summed up the matter both accurately and succinctly in a note in his *Philosophical Commentaries*: “Matter once allow’d. I defy any man to prove God is not matter” [Pt. II, no.20] Berkeley’s remedy for materialism was to argue that matter does not exist; Edwards’ first and major step, on the other hand, was to argue that matter is not a substance’ (‘EI’, *Works6*, 63).

<sup>184</sup> Cf. Lowance, ‘EI’, *Works11*, 16.

<sup>185</sup> Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 54.

<sup>186</sup> Anderson, ‘EI’, *Works6*, 54.



the Divine Being, that bodies do not exist by themselves as substances at all. ‘In taking this point,’ explains Anderson, ‘Edwards not only fashioned a rebuttal of materialism, but in doing so he undermined the assumptions of the metaphysical dualism of Descartes and the Newtonians as well.’<sup>187</sup> Edwards’ declaration of God as a real being, the only substance properly so called, and the ‘substance’ of all things, issues a strong theological statement of the absolute sovereignty of God in relation to the world, and, in terms of metaphysics, how that world might be explained.<sup>188</sup> To be sure, minds and spirit entities were considered differently.

## 2.e. *Lawlike Dispositions and Created Existences*

If, as we have concluded above, dispositions are laws understood as ontological principles with or without circumstantial manifestation, and material bodies themselves are essentially dispositions, then the question needs to be asked whether or not dispositions are the abiding principles of created existence. The logic of Edwards’ conception of the material universe directs an affirmative conclusion. But does this logic of disposition apply to all intelligent being, the final subject of our study? In a note reminding himself to expand this very subject, Edwards indicates that indeed lawlike dispositions constitute ‘all permanent being’:

The manifest analogy between the nature of the human soul and the nature of other things; how laws of nature take place alike; how it is that laws constitute all permanent being in created things, both corporeal and spiritual.

In how many respects the very being of created things depend on laws, or stated methods fixed by God, of events following one another.<sup>189</sup>

The comprehensiveness suggested by his proposal leads to the conclusion that laws do more than ‘constitute all permanent being in created things, both sentient and nonsentient,’ that they in fact *are* the principles of being for created existences, just as Sang Hyun Lee suggests.<sup>190</sup> When referring to spiritual or perceiving beings, Edwards wrote in ‘M’241 that, ‘the [soul’s] essence consists in powers and habits,’ meaning that ‘powers and habits’ (dispositions) do not merely belong to entities as a type of component, but rather they are *constitutive* of their being.<sup>191</sup> Edwards expresses the same point at times by associating the Divine Being closely

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>188</sup> Types, or God in nature, also spoke against metaphysical materialism (see ‘M’362). That outward and created things were only ‘shadows’ of other beings may be understood in part as reaffirming that the entire system of physical objects subsisted only in immediate and continual dependence on God. And this claim in turn was a central support for JE’s belief that everything in nature represented spiritual things, indeed, if perceived spiritually, was in fact God *ad extra*.

<sup>189</sup> *Works*6, 391-92. Jenson is correct to note that “‘Spiritual’ does not here have primarily the sense of *invisible*, but rather of *personal*, indeed *communal*’ (*America’s Theologian*, 17). Aside from stressing the importance of keeping this shift in emphasis in mind, I would make an amendment by changing ‘communal’ to *relational*.

<sup>190</sup> *Philosophical Theology*, passim.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 48.



with the divine power.<sup>192</sup> The difference between the Divine Being and created existences lies in the fact that God is the One who ‘constitute[s] all permanent being’ in ‘laws, or stated methods’. While non-sentient created existences can in some sense be reduced and said to be ‘dependent on’ lawlike dispositions, yet neither God nor sentient being can, though they are essential to the being of both.

Though Prof. Lee’s insights are profoundly helpful in his analysis of Edwards’ ontology, yet Lee goes too far in his insistence that, insofar as powers and laws are associated with dispositions, bodies, beasts *and* sentient entities do not merely have dispositions, but *are*, for all intents and purposes, lawlike dispositions. Indeed, Lee goes so far as to say that dispositions are the essence of all things and all being whatsoever. Thereby claiming that not only has Edwards abandoned the Aristotelian-Scholastic idea of the material world, but by including ‘spirits’ and all sentient beings in his consideration of dispositional essences, Edwards is proposing a dispositional conception of all existences, of all perceived reality, and only a dispositional conception of all existences and reality.<sup>193</sup>

But Edwards’ emphasis is on the ‘permanent’ nature of created things, that is, how they abide and what makes up their constitutional structure – not the very substance or essence of spiritual and sentient beings. This is clear from Edwards’ own exposition. He says, ‘In how many respects the very being of created things depend on laws, or stated methods, fixed by God’. The point is that there is a deference between ‘the very being’ and dependence ‘on laws, or stated methods’. The two are not equivalent: one depends on the other; Edwards assumes a sentient ‘self’. In order for Lee’s analysis to hold true, being and laws would have to be equivalent, so that his position would be reduced to a nonsensical tautology, with Edwards arguing: (*q.d.*) ‘Dispositions constitute all permanent dispositions in dispositions, both corporeal and spiritual. In how many respects the very dispositions of created dispositions depends on dispositions ...’. But Leon Chai explodes this thinking when we argues that such an arrangement requires the equating of laws with powers, which cannot be maintained: ‘a law has to do with the manner in which a power is exercised, rather than the power itself.’<sup>194</sup> Indeed, one must respect the fact that Edwards is speaking about the *how-ness* of intelligent perceiving being, both infinite and finite, not the absolute *what-ness*, though, to be sure, dispositions in fact ‘constitute all *permanent* being’ (i.e. the kind of being that

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<sup>192</sup> ‘M’94 and 259, *Works*13, 262, 367. Holbrook alludes to this when he notes that JE deposits at the onset both value and power in being itself. Value did not have to be imported from elsewhere into the realm of power, since both were inherent in being. Holbrook concludes by saying, ‘God does not create value, law or ethical essences which He then obeys. They are constitutive of being itself’ (*Ethics of JE*, 136). Cf. Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility*, c. 3.

<sup>193</sup> Bodies and sentient entities differ in that the latter’s dispositions are designated a *locus*, which JE calls ‘substance’. This is further explained in Chapter III.

<sup>194</sup> *Limits of Enlightenment*, 143



endures, as it were, *permanently*) and that ‘created being’, though distinguishable from dispositions, is nevertheless dependent upon dispositions for its existence.

The terminal point of the discussion, however, is God, who ‘fixes’ the exercise of His power to function as laws or ‘stated methods’, applied in a lawlike dispositional way – as an outward expression of His internal fullness.

Thus, the logic of God’s ‘comprehension’ of created reality not only posits necessary dispositions to God, but inasmuch as God’s ‘expansive’ disposition encompasses the temporal realm as a matrix of divine beauty, then all things are rendered compositions of dispositions, though in the case of intelligent perceiving beings they are not reduced to mere dispositions.

### ***3. A Trinitarian Model of Internal Relations***

As we noted earlier, Edwards’ discussions on ‘EXCELLENCY’ began not only to play a prominent role in his understanding of God’s cosmological and teleological relation to the world, but also the evolutionary process by which he related them to the ontological nature of all things. God, in particular, is ‘infinite greatness and excellency’ (*M*44). In saying this, Edwards recalls his axiom concerning the ontological significance of ‘excellency’, namely, that being must consist in *relations* or else there can be ‘no such thing as consent.’<sup>195</sup>

The corollary (*M*117) that demonstrates the validity of this principle focuses on the Godhead. In it he writes, ‘Again, we have shown that one alone cannot be excellent; inasmuch as, in such case, there can be no consent. Therefore, if God is excellent, there must be plurality in God; otherwise there can be no consent in him.’<sup>196</sup> Wallace Anderson explains the significance of Edwards’ innovative conception of the Trinity:

it seems evident that his new concept of being, when applied to the divine perfections, stands in sharp contrast to the long tradition of philosophical theology into which he was born. God’s goodness is not grounded in the absolute unity and simplicity of his being, but belongs to him only as he constitutes a plurality involving relations.<sup>197</sup>

The important thing for us to note is that Edwards now explains the ontological structure of (ideal) being in terms of internal relations. He uses God as his primary illustration for trying the plausibility of his aesthetic experiments in ontology because the Divine Being is for him the first and necessary being, ‘the head of the universal system of existence; the foundation and fountain of all being.’<sup>198</sup> After using God as his ‘test case’ or prototypical model, he then makes application to created existences on the ‘scale of being.’

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<sup>195</sup> ‘The Mind’ 1, *Works*6, 337.

<sup>196</sup> *Works*13, 284.

<sup>197</sup> ‘EI’, *Works*6, 84; cf. Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility*, 117-84.

<sup>198</sup> *TV*, *Works*8, 551.



There are three relational principles that make God God. (1) Self-relation: the Godhead is an inner trinity of excellent relations. Which is to say, who God is, is inseparable from His relations to Himself. (2) The *quality* of God's relation to Himself determines the nature of his existence. Since God is an infinitely excellent or beautiful being, His being is of infinite 'proportion'. (3) The *extent* of God's consent to Himself and other entities communicates something about His being. For God to be 'love' He must infinitely consent to His own innertrinitarian self and the idea of Himself replicated '*ad extra*'.<sup>199</sup>

Edwards then applies these three relational principles to his 'scale of being', by employing his philosophy of dispositions to depict their teleological significance: for inasmuch as God's emanationistic activities through the created order have one telic purpose, viz. 'the glory of God,' created existences are included in that functional end. In this way, the external, expansive character of the divine beauty is explained through the 'scale of being,' where God's infinite being encompasses external existences. According to Edwards, all value and substantiality ('realness') of being on the scale is understood in terms of nearness to God and other beings through 'mutual consent'. Thus, beauty or the relationality of excellency determines the ontological status and value of all being, including humans, even reprobates.

So, just as Edwards predicates the whole 'scale' of created existences upon ontological arguments for a necessary being, so too his analysis of being in terms of excellency rests upon God; this time in terms of necessary beauty and plurality. In other words, Edwards gives philosophical depth to his philosophy of being by modeling the ontological structure of created existences upon his Trinitarian formula and analysis of God's relations. What is more, God's relational excellence is not external to God but inasmuch as God's relational excellence is His idea of Himself '*ad extra*' (replicated in other minds), it must be considered *internal*, according to Edwards, and therefore constitutive of the Divine Being's essential idea of Himself: hence God's comprehensiveness and the unity, interrelatedness, and connectedness of the matrix of existence, as well as Edwards' panentheistic expressions.

Edwards starts in 1722 with proof arguments for the existence of God and then moves on to develop a sophisticated aesthetic philosophical theory based on 'excellency' (autumn 1723), only to synthesize them in 1723 and early 1724. The Fusion of these theories emerges in a rash of 'Miscellanies' entries on God and the Trinity.

The notion of excellency turns inward in 'M'94, Edwards' first substantial treatment of the Trinity in his corpus. Prior to this time, Edwards shows an appreciation for the tri-unity of God, yet without clarity or sophistication.<sup>200</sup> For this reason, I surmise that it was not until sometime after Edwards began his Bolton, Connecticut ministry (summer 1723) that he

<sup>199</sup> See Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, c. 7.

<sup>200</sup> See for instance, 'The Value of Salvation' (1723), *Works* 10, 325, 331.



encountered an accommodating formulation of the Trinity, onto which he superimposed his developing philosophical/aesthetic theories.

It was the celebrated Bostonian minister, Cotton Mather, whom I believed supplied Edwards a trinitarian formulation that accommodated his recent philosophical thoughts on the relationality of excellency. The adoption of Mather's unique explication of the Trinity gave Edwards occasion to apply his aesthetic-ontic principles to the 'great head of being'.

Cotton Mather's *Blessed Union* (Boston, 1692) contains within it Edwards' proximate source for several 'Miscellanies' entries on the Trinity, and serves as a seminal thesis for his 'Essay on the Trinity' (c.1730).<sup>201</sup> Mather's *Religio Philosophica* (London, 1721) concisely repeats his basic treatment of the Trinity and *analogia entis* as found in *Blessed Unions*.<sup>202</sup>

For Mather, those that are but analogous 'relations' when transferred to created beings are 'glorious relatives' in the infinite God. For Edwards, however, the glorious 'relatives' of the infinite God, which Mather described, are so because God's being is excellent and relational.

At first, Edwards' dispositional content is not pronounced. The argument in 'M'94 emphasizes harmony and beauty before ontological principles: for God to be excellent He cannot be a stark singularity, but rather multi-personal. But 'M'96 and 'The Mind' 45 make the ontological point more certain than 94. In them Edwards says:

As to God's excellence, it is evident it consists in the love of himself. For He was as excellent before he created the universe as he is now. But if the excellence of spirits consists in their disposition and action, God could be excellent no other way at that time, for all the exertions of himself were towards himself. But he exerts himself towards himself no other way than in infinitely loving and delighting in himself, in the mutual love of the Father and the Son. This makes the third, the personal Holy Spirit or the holiness of God, which is his infinite beauty, and this is God's infinite consent to being in general.<sup>203</sup>

Thus, Edwards combines the logic of a self-communicating divine Being with Mather's depiction of the basic functions of the divine self, namely, essential knowing/willing and essential loving.<sup>204</sup> The three persons of the Trinity are understood as the result of God's disposition to be glorified within Himself 'these two ways':

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<sup>201</sup> Here I am indebted to Thomas A. Schafer, who first stated that Mather's Trinitarian formula is 'remarkably similar to JE's argument' (*Works*13, 256 n.1).

<sup>202</sup> Although neither book is recorded in the 'Catalogue' or 'Account Book,' JE would have been well acquainted with *Blessed Unions* through his father's library in East Windsor, only sixteen miles from JE's charge at Bolton. For a transcribed inventory of Timothy Edwards' library contents, see Minkema, 'The Edwardses', 646-66.

<sup>203</sup> *Works*6, 364.

<sup>204</sup> At this point I again differ with Lee, who, like Perry Miller before him, believes JE's doctrine of the Trinity manifests a dependence upon Locke's concept of the self's reflective or introspective experience of its internal acts (*Essay*, bk.2, 1 nos.1-5). However, Sang Hyun Lee produces no evidence for this claim, while the contents of 'M' nos. 94, 96, 238, and the 'Essay on the Trinity' mirror the content of Mather's Trinitarian formulation in *Blessed Unions*. This is not to say that Mather or JE do not have in mind the Lockean concept (published in 1689), but that JE, in this case, is working primarily from Mather and Locke secondarily.



(1) By appearing, or being manifested to himself in his own perfect idea, or, in his Son, who is the brightness of his glory; (2) by enjoying and delighting in himself, by flowing forth in infinite love and delight towards himself, or in his Holy Spirit.<sup>205</sup>

The result of which constitutes ‘God, the idea of God, and the love of God.’<sup>206</sup> Thus begins Edwards’ application of his first axiomatic, ontic principle of relationality: ‘*relations are internal to being*’<sup>207</sup> – even the being of God.

But again we are forced to ask whether God’s dispositions—such that give reflexive exertions to Himself—are the essence of the divine being, as Prof. Lee claims? Whereas Thomas Aquinas affirms God’s aseity by maintaining that God’s essence is His existence, Edwards asserts that the Father’s essence is His existence.<sup>208</sup> Thus, he locates the absolute aseity of the deity in the Father. This concurs with Michael Jenkins analysis of Edwards’ understanding of God. Jenkins argues that Edwards’ theological program follows the Western tendency to begin with the one essence of God (*De Deo Uno*) before going on to describe a distinction of persons (*De Deo Trino*).<sup>209</sup> Indeed, Edwards’ logic of disposition follows this pattern as it applies to the Trinity.

A reflex act of knowledge and his viewing himself, knowing himself and so knowing his own knowledge and the Son is begotten. There is such a thing in God as knowledge of knowledge, and Idea of an idea. Which can be nothing else than the Idea or knowledge repeated.<sup>210</sup>

Thus, the Second Person of the Trinity is a repetition, via reflexive knowledge, of the Father’s actuality, and this repetition of the first subsistence is the result of the ontologically productive activity of the divine disposition. What is repeated, however, is not another god, but the Second Person of the Godhead.<sup>211</sup>

Edwards is clear to state that God’s essence is the *Idea* of Himself, not simply a disposition to exert Himself. Which is to say, that which is the antecedent to the exercise of some disposition is the knowledge and Idea of God, God as an essential and substantial Idea. The disposition does not constitute the Idea, but the contrary. The Father repeats the divine actuality not only reflexively knowing His self but also reflexively loving what He knows. The act of the Father’s loving what He knows is a further exercise (this time, affectional) of the Father’s disposition. Now, through God’s love of His Idea of Himself, God’s self-communication is accomplished affectionally. Hence Edwards’ second ontological principle of relationality is applied to g. Loving, or consenting, or perfect excellency, is the *quality* of God’s relation to Himself.

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<sup>205</sup> ‘M’444, *Works*13, 495.

<sup>206</sup> ‘M’308, *Works*13, 393.

<sup>207</sup> Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 77.

<sup>208</sup> See *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 22.

<sup>209</sup> Jenkins, “‘The Being of Beings’”, 181.

<sup>210</sup> *An Unpublished Essay of Edwards on the Trinity*, ed. G.P. Fisher, 132.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.



The Holy Spirit ‘is the act of God between the Father and the Son, infinitely loving and delighting in each other’ (*M*96). The Holy Spirit as the consenting relation between the Father and the Son is the divine beauty in the fullness of actuality, ‘God’s infinite consent to Being in general,’<sup>212</sup> the excellency of the Godhead. The double procession of the Holy Spirit is the divine love of God for His own ‘image’, which the Father breathes forth to the Son and the Son breathes forth to the Father. The following paragraph serves as a concise summation of Edwards’ doctrine of the Trinity:

And this I suppose to be that blessed Trinity that we read of the Holy Scriptures. The Father is the deity subsisting in the prime, unoriginated and most absolute manner, or the deity in its direct existence. The Son is the deity generated by God’s understanding, or having an idea of himself and subsisting in that idea. The Holy Ghost is the deity subsisting in act, or the divine essence flowing out and breathed forth in God’s infinite love to and delight in Himself. And I believe the whole Divine essence does truly and distinctly subsist both in the Divine idea and Divine love, and that each of them are properly distinct persons.<sup>213</sup>

Thus, the Father is the first and primordial actuality of the divine beauty, which is fully repeated as an innertrinitarian relation of beauty and, consequently, a full self-communication of it *ad intra*. The inner plurality of the Godhead, along with the quality of God’s relation to Himself determines both His existence and the nature of His existence. Since God is an infinitely excellent or beautiful being, His being is of infinite ‘proportions’.<sup>214</sup> But, again, what is prior is the Father’s perfect and substantial Idea of Himself, of His perfections – the Son and the Spirit.

Just as God is the ‘greatest’ being with respect to the ‘scale of being’, so Edwards’ conception of God’s excellent idea of Himself, inclusive of a fully actual, beautifully exercise disposition, accentuates divine uniqueness, incommensurableness, and transcendence. In this way, beauty or excellency articulates the essential idea of God, while God’s disposition gives it a certain concreteness in the Trinity, as the Trinity, as well as argues for the ontological necessities of the Godhead.

The third and last of Edwards’ ontological principles of relationality or excellency pertains to the *extent* or degree of God’s own ‘consent to being’. The extent of God’s consent to Himself is, of course, evident in Edwards’ analysis of God’s innertrinitarian relationships: it is of infinite proportions (and therefore timeless and unquantifiable). What needs to be discussed presently, however, is the extent of God’s consent to ‘the whole of being’.

If ‘All that he [God] does [is] nothing but excellent’, then the excellence of God must include the creation and conservation of beings and entities. Thus, God’s relation to the world is an excellent and consenting relation; one in which God teleologically and panentheistically manifests Himself as an inherently excellent or beautiful being. For Edwards, the whole of the

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> ‘Essay on the Trinity’, *Treatise*, 118. Cf. *M*448, *Works*13, 495.

<sup>214</sup> *Works*2, 298.



created order is an expression and repetition of the inner actuality of God's fullness: God's relation to is therefore excellent, just as God is related excellently to Himself *ad extra*.

Thus, this relational excellence is not external to God but, inasmuch as it is His idea of Himself *ad extra* (replicated in *IPMs*), it is internal and therefore constitutive of His essential idea of Himself: hence God's comprehensiveness; the unity, interrelatedness, and connectedness of the matrix of existence, as well as Edwards' panentheistic expressions.

In the outcome of Edwards' trinitarian formulation, we find that the most important implication of his definition and use of excellency is that every real being must, as a condition of its existence, stand in some relation to other things, and ultimately to all other things.<sup>215</sup> This, of course, implies that the universe itself is necessarily pluralistic and bound to God's being. Consequently, the ontological status of beings in terms of substantiality or 'realness' on the 'scale of being' is defined by the extent and quality of their *relation(s)* to other beings.

Lee insightfully delineates the contents of Edwards' model for ontological structure, to show the plurality of the universe as well as its inner relational composition, by presenting its three maxims. 'First of all,' says Lee, '*what an entity is, is inseparable from its relations*.'<sup>216</sup> Just as the inner being of God is explained through dispositional and relational concepts, so too created entities, modeled after the defining inner plurality of the Godhead, are likewise presented with *relational necessity*. With God, however, there is a peculiar internal uniqueness which does not permit existences outside of the Godhead to be ontologically defined in a manner identical to God: 'Tis peculiar to God that he has beauty within himself, consisting in being's consenting with his own being, or the love of himself in his own Holy Spirit.'<sup>217</sup> For all existences outside of the Godhead, being is determined by how an entity is related with *other* entities *and* to God. With God, however, existences are comprehended by His being. Either way, determinative relations are not external but internal to being.<sup>218</sup>

Lee identifies the second maxim of Edwards' relational conception of the structure of being as: '*relations determine the existence of an entity*'.<sup>219</sup> Since laws (dispositions) are the quality of resistance (existence) itself, laws must be exercised if there is to be existence. And, since the exercise of laws (the relation of relationships) can only mean a multiplication of relations of particular sorts, entities cannot actually exist without actual relations. In other words, the relationality of the created order does not admit that any one of its pluralities of entities is an ultimate substance or stark singularity in the sense that it can exist independently of all others, or that it can have any unity, autonomy, or self-identity apart from the relations in which it stands to others. This is not to say that all individuality is extinguished in a

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<sup>215</sup> Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 77.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> 'The Mind' 45, *Works*6, 365.

<sup>218</sup> Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 78.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 79.



particular entity because of its relational constitution. Bodies, we remember, exist in a *particular* point in time and space, and have a particular functional purpose (telic-orientation) in their divinely determined existence. Nevertheless, entities never enjoy pure individuality: ‘Since the law that governs the individual activities of resisting [existing] is a relation of relations, the acts of resisting can only be the acts of relating to other entities – that is, the acts of resisting in a particular sort of relationship with other entities.’<sup>220</sup> The result is a nexus of laws of dispositions, a matrix of excellent relations or existences. Therefore, a being is not only defined or constituted through its relations, but it also exists only through its relations. The whole of reality is, as it were, a network or matrix of interrelated relationships.

The third element of Edwards’ model for ontological structure has to do with the *extent* of the mutual relations of all entities. In Edwards’ ontology an entity’s structure (not substance!) is defined as a law or a nexus of laws, and, since laws are relations of relationships, the very existence and the essence of an entity is inseparable from its relations. The most fundamental logical ground for such a perspective is Edwards’ contention that the universe is the external expression and repetition of God’s internal being. Since God is a unified being (with internal plurality), then His *ad extra* existence must be a unified system.<sup>221</sup> In sum, what a thing is, is also determined by its ‘*tendency to be related with other entities*’ in a manner harmonious with the law of the whole, that is, with the beauty of God.<sup>222</sup>

The beauty or excellency of God, then, is the standard, point of reference, goal or ‘end,’ and defining reality for all other beings. Being is not simply determined by being-in-relation, even to the whole of being (point number two), but being’s quality and quantity of being-in-relation. Being-in-relation necessarily means being part of the network or matrix of relations, and to a degree related to all relations. The operative word for Edwards however is ‘degree.’ The degree of being’s ‘substantiality’ is qualitatively and quantitatively determined, which, in turn, determines being’s value on the ‘scale of being’ and, therefore, worth to God.

The three relational concepts determinative of being are the same with created existences as they are within the Godhead. The three dimensions of *relatedness* are: (1) the relationship an entity has to itself, (2) to certain other entities, and (3) to the (law of the) whole (i.e. Being in general, God).

A material body, then, is related to itself in its particularity – a resistance in a particular time and place. Secondly, a material body is related to other bodies through the laws which

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid. Cf. ‘M’125[a], *Works*13, 288.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 80-82.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid. 80.



govern that particular type of body. And thirdly, a nonsentient being is related to the whole by virtue of its perceived place with the matrix of reality.<sup>223</sup>

Of course, Edwards' most important application of these relational principles is to human beings. As with God, so too a human being's essential nexus of relations contains three elements, which we unpack from Edwards' dense formula: '[Existence], consists in the perception of these three things: of the consent of being to its own being; of its own consent to being; and of being's consent to being.'<sup>224</sup>

1. *IPB*'s self-identity or the consent that exists between its constituent parts ('the consent of being to its own being');
2. Its relations with other entities (its 'consent to being'); and
3. Its consent to the whole ('being's consent to being').

Likewise, the 'happiness' of *IPB* consists in the knowledge and love of beauty.

What does this three-dimensional structure of being mean for the nature of human beings? It means that the essential structure of a human being, first of all, is conceived by Edwards as a nexus of laws that is a tendency to three relationships: to one's self (where we find Edwards' Trinitarian formula applied to the psychological constitution of *IPB*<sup>225</sup>), to others, and to the whole ('Being in general'/'Being-as-manifest'). As we shall see in the next chapter, each relation corresponds to a relation within the Godhead. God's mind and ontological relations and human minds and ontological relations are parallels of sorts, differentiated by autonomy, necessity of being, and, significantly, by degrees.

There is, then, a three-dimensional structure in the essence of a human being, where the first two relational dimensions are governed by the third.

#### **4. Concluding Remarks**

Jonathan Edwards' conversion marked the beginning of not only a spiritual and theological journey, but a philosophical one as well. The 'holy disposition' infused into his soul brought with it a capacity to 'perceive' reality, as it truly was – an extension of God's excellency. Convinced that the 'vision' of God in reality was not his affected narrative but God's, he set himself to reconstruct the evidence of nature (and, later, history) accordingly. The content of his Spirit regulated, spiritual sensibilities was, for him, an authentic Christian and spiritual

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<sup>223</sup> This is how the idea of its existence may be understood as a perceived existence. To JE, of course, a material body is nothing more than an idea. Dispositions, relations, and a matrix or existences are simply real ideas in God's mind communicated to *IPMs* about the perceived reality of such ideas.

<sup>224</sup> 'The Mind' 1, *Works*6, 338.

<sup>225</sup> Cf. Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity* in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol.3, ed. Schaff, 125, 143, 156. JE was aware of Augustine's work through Chevalier Ramsey. See 'M' 1253 [TS Beinecke].



view of the world, one which corresponded to Scripture and, conveniently, concurred with his Reformed confessions.

He discovered through his experience that one cannot satisfactorily understand God's reality in light of man and the world, as the rationalists attempted, but vice versa. Indeed, he learned that the world and all things associated with it were pregnant with cosmic significance through God's purposeful presence.

This was Edwards' post-conversion starting point, the mental state with which he engaged the Enlightenment and his colonial New England context. The vision of 'God as God' took precedence over established theological positions, philosophical theories, and any and all competing worldviews, scientific or otherwise. For, according to Edwards, the worldview it facilitated was the only one that consistently brought together divine revelation, spiritual sensibilities, the power of reason, and scientific observations concerning the physical world, into one compelling interpretive framework of intelligible reality. Thus, in light of its internal and external, subjective and objective confirmation, Edwards began re-evaluating theology, conversion, history, creation, 'natural philosophy', and human beings. In the end, God constitutes the sum total of his 'Theory of Everything.'

Despite his unconventional formulation of the Trinity and the panentheistic implications of his account of God's relation to the world, Edwards nonetheless was willing throughout his career to put his signature to the *Westminster Standards*. Which is to say, he did not think his speculative philosophical-theologizing was outside the parameters of Reformed orthodoxy.<sup>226</sup>

True to his covenant faith and heritage, Edwards champions a doctrine of God-centeredness. For him, however, theocentrism is not a single doctrine, but a genus with many species. Characteristic of his thought is a 'theocentrism of ends'. Important to Edwards, above all things, is that God gets the glory worthy of His being and nature. When he considers Rom. 11:28, 'for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things',<sup>227</sup> Edwards emphasizes the 'to him'. The theological equivalence of his telic-theocentrism lies in the *pactum salutis*, through which God brings about His glorification in the work of redemption. All things exist for God's glorification and are part of this divine work. Consequently, all things are tied and moving toward a programmatic 'ultimate end'. Not only is a static God foreign to his thinking, so is a static creation, because, for him, reality itself is the matrix of God's beautiful being moving toward that 'ultimate end'. In fact, divine goal-orientation is so dominant a concept in his thinking apparatus that it remains doubtful he discusses any item in his corpus outside of its aegis. It is not surprising, therefore, to find all things—creation, providence, causality—affected, indeed, subjugated to its agenda. It is this uncompromising belief in the ultimacy of God that Edwards both peculiar and uncongenial to the modern temper.

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<sup>226</sup> Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 51.

<sup>227</sup> See *TV, Works*8, 551.



But Edwards goes even further, God is not only central to the believer's reality, but also the unbeliever's reality, for God Himself *is* 'real existence', which 'comprehends all being'. Thus, according to Edwards' new aesthetic and theocentric vision and the ontic, telic, and cosmic conclusions he draws from it, all created existences derive their being and value from God's 'comprehension'. Which means that God's comprehensiveness holds both ontological and epistemological consequences for all created intelligence: whether regenerate or not, elect or not, every man's reality is directly related to, encompassed by, and derived from God.

In Edwards' way of thinking, if Reformed theology was to compete in the hostile marketplace of Enlightenment thought, then it needed to articulate its worldview in terms that encompassed all aspects of a reality undergoing a paradigm shift in physics and philosophy.<sup>228</sup> On a sophisticated level, he learned that this could be done through metaphysical concepts of 'Being in general', 'being-as-manifest', and 'all-comprehensive being'. Sensibly, these abstractions become concrete or earthy through dispositions and typological associations in connection with a theology of nature.

Whether philosophically or concretely, God's essential presence and purpose in the world are founded upon three fundamental concepts: excellency, idealism, and lawlike relational-dispositions. Edwards' twofold doctrine of occasionalism serves the latter two. The world is an ideal one, but one manifest and comprehensible in terms of lawlike dispositions. The relationality or plurality of the world articulates its beauty or excellence, which, to Edwards, is mental existence, an instance of 'excellence' comprehended by God.

Edwards' 'theocentrism of ends' or 'metaphysics of finality' brings his thoughts on excellency, idealism, and relational-dispositions, under one heading to express and explain the single point that God indeed gets His glory. All things in their goal-oriented dispositional structures are therefore predestined, prescribed, and perfectly exercised according to the divine will to glorify Himself. As we shall see in the next chapter, these ideas especially apply to human agents, because in the world according to Edwards human beings created in divine image are God's principal means for accomplishing His self-glorifying 'ends'.

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<sup>228</sup> Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 60.



## **Chapter III**

### **The Beauty of Being: An Aesthetic Ontology of ‘Human Being’**

1. ‘Happiness’ and Being
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### III

## *The Beauty of Being: An Aesthetic Ontology of 'Human Being'*

GLORY OF GOD. For God to glorify Himself is to discover Himself in His works or to communicate Himself in His works, which is all one.  
*'Miscellanies'* 247

The preceding chapter concluded with a brief examination of Edwards' depiction of a human being's dispositional essence as a nexus of laws tending to three relationships.<sup>1</sup> Relations were understood to be internal to being, descriptive of the ontological structure within the dispositional constitution of human being: hence, Edwards' commitment to a doctrine of internal relations. The implications of the three categories of relations—to one's self, to others, and to the whole (i.e. the beauty of God)—were seen to have crucial meaning for the way in which Edwards regards and interprets the existence and purpose of man with relation to God's program of self-glorification/self-replication. For Edwards, the existence and purpose of any thing is never detached from God's teleological purposes. The same principle gained from his theocentric re-evaluation of creation is now applied to human beings. Indeed, whatever supposed independent purposes an individual may have for him/herself is altogether subservient to God's self-glorifying purposes in, through, and by his/her existence. Going directly to Edwards' point, God's teleological comprehensiveness is total – nothing is exempt from fulfilling His determinative ends.

Theologically, Edwards' doctrines of predestination, providence, and the divine decrees insure that whatever secondary purpose an individual may have for him/herself is ultimately linked to and terminates in God's glorification and the manifestation of one or more of His attributes, regardless of whether the individual is voluntarily consenting or conscious of it.<sup>2</sup>

According to Edwards, who happily subscribed to the *Westminster Confession*, the chief end of man is indeed to glorify God. Whether man enjoys God or not does not detract from the fact that God most definitely will glorify Himself in, by, and through man. Man's happiness or enjoyment of God is, nevertheless, the chief personal benefit of a consenting (loving) relation to God. As man consents to God, God is glorified through the dynamics of that *direct* relation of *mutual consent*. As God is glorified, spiritually cognizant man rejoices in that glory and becomes 'happy above all things'. The ontological benefit for man in this relation is the increased substantiality (realness, excellence, proportion) of his being: epistemologically, it gives him access to a dimension of reality unobtainable in an unregenerate condition. In Edwards' mind, the fulfilled spiritual happiness of man—

<sup>1</sup> V.s. Chapter II, §3. Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 79.

<sup>2</sup> 'M'29, 51 and 75, *Works*13, 216-17, 228-29, 243; cf. 'The Sole Consideration, that God is God, Sufficient to Still All Objections to His Sovereignty' (1735), *Banner-Works*, 2:108-09.



stemming from a spiritually restored state of mind—can be measured by ‘degrees’ that directly correspond to the ‘excellency or proportion’ of man’s being (*M* 662).

As I explained in the ‘Introductory Chapter’, Michael McClymond demurs at this point. He remains unconvinced that man, especially the natural-man, could have any degree of ‘excellency or proportion’. If, he argues, the conceptual link between Edwards’ teleology and ethics is the crucial idea that might be termed the ‘principle of proportionate regard’ (where in Edwards: ‘’tis fit that the regard of the Creator should be proportioned to the worthiness of objects, as well as the regard of creatures’), then God, no less than human beings, is ethically bound to ‘take into account and respect the inherent worth of each entity.’<sup>3</sup> The question then is, what inherent ‘worth’, ‘value’, or ‘fitness’—designators which indicate that moral agency rests on inherent values—does man possess?

The ‘principle of proportionate regard’ permits Edwards to ground his ethics on ontology and evaluate God’s intentions in creating (the treatise *Two Dissertations* develops this fully). Yet, as McClymond points out, basing a calculus of values on God’s being does not easily translate over to finite beings. For instance, if the worthiness of any given object is reckoned as the mathematical product of its ‘degree of existence’ multiplied by its ‘degree of excellence’, and God—who is ‘infinitely excellent’ *and* ‘infinite being’ and is therefore ‘infinitely honorable and worthy’—has infinite and supreme regard for Himself, that is, He has perfect regard for the only infinitely worthy being, viz. Himself, then what value or excellence is left for the creature? It seems that God should only have regard for Himself. But Edwards does not stop there, he also says that *only* God has ‘real being’ and excellence, or, alternatively, that God is ‘the sum of all being’ and ‘excellence’.<sup>4</sup> It would follow, then, that only God is worthy to be regarded by Himself. Edwards says as much in *End of Creation*:

As the Creator is infinite, and has all possible existence, perfection and excellence, so *he must have all possible regard*.<sup>5</sup>

Unable to reconcile the perplexities this principle engenders, McClymond concludes,

When all is said in *End of Creation*, it is hard to see how God’s proportionate regard includes a concern for mere mortals. Moreover, there is a moral as well as a metaphysical issue, since humans are not only finite but sinful. The morally depraved are not obvious objects for God’s proportionate regard.<sup>6</sup>

In short, not only do the presuppositions of Edwards’ ethics seem inconsistent in light of the proportionate regard principle, but also his teaching on unmerited grace appears superfluous.

Although Edwards primarily employed proportionate regard to underscore the ontological uniqueness and incommensurability of God, not to analyze the possible relations

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<sup>3</sup> *EofC*, *Works*8, 424; McClymond, *Encounters*, 53-54.

<sup>4</sup> ‘The Mind’ 6, *Works*6, 345; *TV*, *Works*8, 551; *M* 1077 [TS Beinecke].

<sup>5</sup> *Works*8, 424. Emphasis mine.

<sup>6</sup> *Encounters*, 62.



between creatures of differing ‘degrees of excellence’ (which he rarely and only generally does between the regenerate and unregenerate portions of humankind),<sup>7</sup> yet the point remains: Can God have regard to man within this scheme? If so, what comprises man’s excellence?

Stephen Holmes, looking at this problem through a theological lens, accentuates the crisis in Edwards’ thought by focusing on the reprobate. He builds his case through an examination of Edwards’ Trinitarian creation-theology. We noted in the preceding chapter that Edwards subsumes the doctrine of divine perfections under the doctrine of the Trinity. Its relation to creation was in the following: just as God’s internal (*ad intra*) glory consists of His Trinitarian being, so too God’s external (*ad extra*) glory is Trinitarian. In Holmes’ words: ‘The flowing out of God’s glory is twofold, consisting in the communication of knowledge to the creature and the communication of love to the creature. These correspond to the internal begetting of the Son, or Logos, or Wisdom, of God, and proceeding of the Spirit, or Love, of God.’<sup>8</sup> Creation, then, is an inner-Trinitarian event, an *ad extra* communication of the inner-divine perfections, particularly the Son, but also the Spirit.<sup>9</sup>

When Holmes considers the Church (the elect) in this respect, God’s self-communication *as* the Son is internally coherent. The redeemed participate in God’s perfect knowledge of Himself through their union with Christ, and they participate in God’s perfect love of Himself through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (who is the sum ‘purchase’ of all of Christ’s work).<sup>10</sup> Creation—with respect to the Church—is eminently gospel-centered and therefore valuable and meaningful to God: ‘The end of the creation of God was to provide a spouse for His Son Jesus Christ that might enjoy Him and on whom He might pour forth His love.’<sup>11</sup> The fulfillment of this ‘end’ is then threefold: (1) there is the ‘in-gathering’ of the elect, ‘Christ’s bride’, who from eternally past are divinely constituted one with Him; (2) through the Church’s participatory union with Christ or *ekstasis*, God is genuinely communicated and replicated *ad extra* in a Christological-creation; and (3) all is accomplished within the framework of a gospel-centered narrative.

Here McClymond finds an answer to at least the elect portion of humanity: Edwards’ Christ-centered doctrine of predestination constitutes all elect natural-men (past, present, and future) as *in* Christ. God elects His Son to mediatorial office through being joined to the man

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Jenkins, ‘The Being of Beings’; McClymond, *Encounters*, 31; and Vëto, *Le pensée de Jonathan Edwards*, 49. JE also employed this principle to considerable effect in his theodicy and rationale for hell as a place of infinite punishment, as well as to explain certain elements in his doctrine of heaven (e.g. the delight of the saints proportionate to their ontological stature in Christ) and, as we shall see in Chapter V, justification.

<sup>8</sup> *God of Grace*, 55.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 70, 98.

<sup>10</sup> Holmes insightfully notes that JE was not content to say with his tradition that the Spirit ‘merely applied the gifts of salvation that the Son had “purchased” from the Father’, but went further by arguing that ‘the Spirit must Himself be seen as what is purchased’ in redemption (*God of Grace*, 182).

<sup>11</sup> ‘M’710, *Works* 18, 339.



Jesus Christ and God elects this man to mediatorial office through union with His Son, and thus God elects the God-man, Jesus Christ to be the ‘head of election and the pattern of all other election.’<sup>12</sup> On the basis of Edwards’ metaphysic of divine constitution God’s election is creative: ‘the glory of God’s love, and the communication of his goodness ... give both ... being and happiness.’<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the elect have divine worth and value because (i) they are ontologically united to Jesus Christ, a divine person with infinite excellencies, and therefore are capable of replicating the divine perfections; (ii) they are His bride (final eschatological fulfillment notwithstanding) and, therefore, (iii) the goal God aimed for in creating the world: ‘the elect creatures ... must be looked upon as the end of all the rest of the creation’;<sup>14</sup> and lastly, (iv) God metaphysically constitutes them as *in* Christ in the election from, as it were, eternity past. The elect, even while in their ‘natural’ condition, are understood to be in Christ ‘before the foundation of the world’ (Eph. 1:4). The graciousness of the gospel is retained in that they are non-meritorious recipients of God’s mercy through Jesus Christ. God’s creation and regard for the elect are therefore telic, theocentric, Christocentric, crucicentric.

Concerning the reprobates, Holmes holds that all those who die in an unredeemed, unregenerate state are by very definition ‘Christless’ and ‘Spiritless’, the status of not only their humanity but also their existence being uncertain. Election for the ‘Bride of Christ’ is redemptively creative, but not so for the reprobate. Therefore, claims Holmes, Edwards proves inconsistent in his Trinitarian and gospel-oriented account of creation and, consequently, predestination. If created being was mediated Christologically and pneumatologically, and if, as Holmes has argued, the same is true of election and the salvation dependent upon it, then should not the determination of the non-elect be the same? But Holmes argues that it is not: the reprobate live out their determination with no reference to Christ. And since Edwards clearly maintains that being human has *immediate* reference to Christ, Holmes has no alternative but to say that, ‘the [reprobate] are, and there is no other way of saying it – less human (or at least “differently human”) than the elect.’<sup>15</sup> They appear neither to be properly human nor possess a God-glorifying function in the world (and afterlife) consistent with Edwards’ doctrines of divine participation through the Son and creation through the Son. Holmes concludes that Edwards exhibits ‘a prior failure to let the

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<sup>12</sup> ‘M’769: ‘... we [i.e. the elect Church] are elected in Christ, as we are elected in his election’ (*Works*18, 418); Holmes, *God of Grace*, 132.

<sup>13</sup> ‘M’704, *Works*18, 316-17. It is for this reason that JE subordinates both creation and providence to the decree of redemption. Here, Jenson (*America’s Theologian*, 106) and Holmes (*God of Grace*, 164) see JE anticipating the Christological doctrine of election developed by Karl Barth.

<sup>14</sup> *EofC*, *Works*8, 443.

<sup>15</sup> This remark recalls a statement made by Anthony Flew in which he calls different kinds of human beings or the Calvinist division between elect/saved and non-elect/unsaved ‘a sort of religious racism; in which the saved and the damned are at least in this most crucial respect, different kinds of creatures’ (*God and Philosophy*, 9).



gospel story inform his position sufficiently', which renders his position concerning the reprobate 'finally indefensible'.<sup>16</sup>

At the heart of both McClymond's and Holmes' criticisms is the problem of Edwards' Calvinistic particularism, a problem which seems to engender two essentially different kinds of human being.<sup>17</sup> For Edwards, God has always aimed to glorify and communicate Himself through the redemptive work of His Son and the outpouring of His Spirit: the atonement/resurrection are the means by which this is achieved; they are the central narrative of the Christ-Church relationship. Creation, history, and all divine providences are the necessary accompaniments of God's gospel design. The telic-orientation of the elect Church is to cognitively and affectionally conform to Christ's image in cross-bearing and Spirit-living. He is their soteriological Redeemer, their ontological excellence, and their essential happiness. Thus, from God's primordial purposes of communicating and glorifying Himself in and through His perfections (the Son and the Spirit) the relationship between God, redemption, creation, providence, history, and the Church is a consistent theological, teleological, eschatological unit. The reprobate, however, have no share in particular redemption and, by direct inference, no share in a Christological-creation or Christ-confirmed humanness. Therefore, the reprobate cannot have any measure of 'excellence' or 'existence'.

Yet, for Edwards, reprobates exist. The question is, how? Moreover, how are they connected with the 'end of creation'? Holmes finds their existence an unanswered enigma in Edwards' system. However, he remains certain that their main purpose in existence serves what he calls a 'vision across the chasm,' by which he means 'the saints rejoicing over the sight of sinners being punished and sinners suffering more from seeing saints in glory.'<sup>18</sup> But, according to Holmes, this theodicy fails because Edwards' Christological-creation prevents

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<sup>16</sup> *God of Grace*, 165, 240. Holmes here develops the suggestions set forth by John E. Colwell in 'The Glory of God's Justice and the Glory of God's Grace: Contemporary reflections on the doctrine of Hell in the teachings of Jonathan Edwards', 291-308.

<sup>17</sup> Holmes' thesis is built upon the view that JE struggled with the doctrine of limited atonement throughout his lifetime (even though JE confesses the opposite, *v.i.* Chapter I§ 2f) because of how impressed he was with the magnitude of Christ's atonement. Thus, according to Holmes, JE struggled to find a coherent place in his system for reprobates because, in the end, they were not really necessary for his theological outlook. I find this assertion completely untenable and therefore reject it in its entirety, as the substance of this and Chapters IV and V will indicate.

Richard A. Muller (*Christ and the Decree*) indicates that the orthodox Reformed tradition, beginning with Calvin and continuing through Beza to Perkins (and, as Holmes suggests, JE), spoke positively of the elect's association, in terms of predestination and identity, with Christ. While, in the words of Holmes, 'the rejected live out their damnation with no reference to Christ ... The shadow side of the decree proceeds with no influence from the Son and no work of the Spirit' (*God of Grace*, 165-67). The suggestion is that in JE's analysis of God's primordial, gospel-oriented purpose in creation, he takes his tradition's teaching on predestination to its logical but unsatisfactory conclusion, viz. that *only* the elect are linked to a Christological-creation and Christ-defined humanity.

<sup>18</sup> *God of Grace*, 213. Both Jonathan L. Kvanvig (*The Problem of Hell*) and Holmes (*God of Grace*, c.6) contest JE's theodicy and find it theologically and metaphysically objectionable. But see support for JE's theory in Davidson, 'Reasonable Damnation', 47-56, and Wainwright, 'Original Sin', 33ff.



consistency: for, although in Edwards sin and evil are part of God's act of self-glorification, yet God's primordial consideration is emphatically gospel-oriented, not creative.<sup>19</sup>

McClymond, on the other hand, speculates that since the reprobate are without 'excellence', that Edwards probably follows Hutcheson in thinking 'the Deity benevolent in the most universal impartial manner';<sup>20</sup> or in other words, that God maintains a posture of objectivity concerning them. How this is possible for beings without a measure of excellence and, therefore, existence is a mystery, if not a logical or ontological impossibility in Edwards' system. Still, McClymond perceives the logic of Edwards' theocentric teleology and says: 'Even the damned served to increase the good attained by God and the saints in heaven by giving God an opportunity for self-manifestation and to the saints a spectacle of God's justice and power.'<sup>21</sup> But because his traditional doctrine of the reprobate did not fuse with the principle of proportionate regard, Edwards made no reference to them in *End of Creation*. According to McClymond, 'The text in fact maintains an eerie silence regarding hell and damnation; its concluding section is written as though there were a single, eternal destiny for all humanity.'<sup>22</sup> He concludes that Edwards had no recourse in that treatise but to offer an apology on the misery of hell and comparative happiness of heaven. While this may have its place in Edwards' decidedly anti-universalistic worldview, yet how a being with no contributive personal being helps facilitate God's self-beautification with no beauty remains to McClymond totally incoherent.

By McClymond's and Holmes's combined account, the reprobate are a disjointed portion of a non-Christological-creation (if there can be such a thing), inappropriately designated 'human', rendered wholly expendable for God to glorify Himself in 'their destruction only.'<sup>23</sup>

The final assessments given by both accounts, however, are premature. While it is true that Edwards gives us two avenues of investigation into his biblical anthropology: a metaphysical and theological approach; yet these are not exclusive options; they overlap; they are merely avenues of emphasis. Understood as emphases, McClymond finds the former insufficient, Holmes the latter. Nonetheless, I believe that Edwards provides an internally consistent account of man, both metaphysically and theologically, by defining 'human' not in terms of two essentially different classifications—elect and reprobate—but through a single onto-

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<sup>19</sup> 'M'993 [TS Beinecke]. Schafer and McClymond suggest that the elect serve in a representative relationship to the rest of creation (i.e. the reprobate). As McClymond explains it, the elect 'fulfilled in actuality what God willed in principle for all creatures' (*Encounters*, 63; cf. Schafer, 'Jonathan Edwards' Conception of the Church', 51-66). The purpose of the elect is then reduced to the aforementioned theodicy. Holmes seems to believe that JE, following lockstep in the Calvinist doctrine of the reprobate, does not even try to reconcile this tension with his creation-theology, but rather concentrates on this theodicy of the 'vision across the chasm'.

<sup>20</sup> Hutcheson, *An Inquiry*, 1:176-77, cited in McClymond, *Encounters*, 63.

<sup>21</sup> *Encounters*, 63.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Banner-Works*, 2:125.



logical characterization. The metaphysical emphasis within Edwards' system provides a sufficient account of man that addresses the theological, while the converse also holds true.

In this chapter I shall concentrate on this metaphysical emphasis, while giving tangential reference to the theological. How the reprobate relates to Edwards' Trinitarian/Christological/redemption-oriented creation (Holmes' theological concerns) shall be discussed in Chapter IV. For the present, we turn our attention to key metaphysical questions, questions that take into account the problems discussed above, as well as in the preceding chapters concerning Edwards' panentheism and telic-cosmology. The following questions arise: How is God in man and man in God, in Edwards' panentheistic scheme? Or, alternatively, How does the Divine Being encompass created minds and in what way do they participate in God's *ad extra* replication? As a further complication we ask with McClymond, how do *sinful* creatures participate in God's beautiful being? That is, what is the ontological function of the natural-man and reprobate in God's grand program? We also ask whether or not there is only one kind of human being; and, if so, what makes a human being a human being? Is it the image of God? If it is, as we might suspect, then of what does Edwards' understanding of the image of God consist?

The answers, I believe, emerge from a more in-depth examination of the nexus of laws tending to the three relations determinative of human being. The ontological structure that Edwards prescribes for *IPBs* itself substantiates my claim that the bare existence of any person—including the reprobate—is intrinsically God-glorifying and possesses inherent value. The consent of 'being to its own being' (what I call 'the relation to self') will receive the most attention; for it embodies key concepts within Edwards' ontology and serves in a foundational capacity for the other two relations – 'being's consent to other beings' (other-relation) and 'being's consent to being in general' (relation to God and the whole matrix of existences).<sup>24</sup> God embeds in each of these relations principles that glorify Him and function to facilitate further manifestations (replications) of His internal perfections and glory. The first and second of these relational principles are essential to all human beings, regenerate and unregenerate alike. They define 'human being' as such. The third relation, though in man *as* an original principle at his creation, is the one lost in the episode of the Fall and restored through supernatural regeneration.

Starting with concreated Adam and Eve and continuing through all their fallen and selectively restored posterity (the elect), and even those on the 'shadow side' of double predestination, all human beings are teleologically crafted by God, in His image, and with inherent God-glorifying ontological principles: their mere existence glorifies God. In *End of Creation*, it is not accurate to say that Edwards took asylum in a beleaguered 'vision across the chasm' theodicy because there was no place for the reprobate in his telic creation-theology

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<sup>24</sup> See 'The Mind' 1, *Works*6, 338.



or so-called ‘proportionate regard’ thesis.<sup>25</sup> Quite the contrary: reprobates have a perfectly useful purpose in God’s program of self-manifestation right here in this life, a purpose which for Edwards continues and intensifies in an afterlife of hell torments.

A central theme throughout this chapter concerns the prominence of Edwards’ telic-theocentricity in his metaphysical thought. Repeatedly, we find him explaining a facet of the nature of being human or the created order as a corollary or application of some thought immediately related to God. If there is some new thought concerning the nature or being of man, it is held up to what may be called ‘the law of the whole’, which is for Edwards ‘the beauty of God’. But more times than not, the development of some anthropological point is simply an appropriation of a concept previously harmonized with his doctrine of God or, more precisely, his Trinitarian ontology.<sup>26</sup>

## 1. ‘*Happiness*’ and *Being*

If McClymond and Holmes were to press their analyses a little further and unpack the aesthetic contents of Edwards’ ontology, particularly in his formula from ‘The Mind’ 1 on ‘Happiness’, they would have found at least metaphysical answers to their questions.

‘Happiness’, Edwards explains, ‘strictly consists in the perception of these three things: of the consent of being to its own being; of its consent to being; and of being’s consent to being [in general].’<sup>27</sup> Into this one word he condenses and combines the cores of his teleology, philosophical anthropology, moral theory, and ontology.

‘Happiness’ itself, as the end of creation, appears as an early, frequent, and enduring theme in his thought. This is because God’s communicated happiness is an aesthetic and telic element woven into His creative purposes. Indeed, it is even woven into the very being of His sentient creatures. What the creature necessarily pursues for happiness, namely, existence, is programmatically linked to God’s ‘ends’ concerning Himself. Recalling that Edwards’ theocentrism is driven by the vision of God pursuing and achieving His ‘ends’ in creation, it is no wonder he conceives of man’s most fundamental and essential principle as one in which the creature’s happiness and God’s happiness are inextricably interconnected. Here we have

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<sup>25</sup> Holmes suggests that this theodicy gradually disappeared after 1700 (due to deistic and universalistic challenges), but was renewed by JE (*God of Grace*, 199ff).

<sup>26</sup> ‘The Mind’ and ‘Miscellanies’ notebooks frequently show JE applying his conclusions about the Deity to humanity and vice versa. ‘The Mind’ 1 and 45 are typical of how he finishes a philosophical thought with immediate implications for his understanding of the will and being of God, and then makes a corollary application to created intelligent beings.

<sup>27</sup> *Works*6, 338. Certainly the third of these relations (‘being’s consent to being [in general]’) is indirectly indicated. God, as the ‘sum of all being’, entails existence or being itself. JE’s use of ‘consent’ remains unaltered from the specialized metaphysical sense discussed in Chapter I, §2.3.



the final application of Edwards' post-conversion agenda, namely, to redefine all existence (this time with man in view) in light of God's goal-oriented, comprehensive reality.

Redefining man in light of God's all-encompassing being arrives not as a late reflection, though it looms large in *End of Creation*, but one that follows hard on his reconception of matter and causality. Hence, as early as 'M'3 (May 1723) Edwards explains:

Now what is glorifying God, but a rejoicing at that glory he has displayed? And understanding of the perfections of God, merely, cannot be the end of the creation; for he had as good not understand it, as see it and not be at all moved with joy at the sight. Neither can the highest end of the creation be the declaring God's glory to others ... Wherefore, seeing happiness is the highest end of the creation of the universe, and intelligent beings are that consciousness of the creation that is to be the immediate subject of this happiness, how happy may we conclude will be those intelligent beings that are to be made eternally happy!<sup>28</sup>

Even in this early entry we can see that the affectional aspects of human existence are distinguished and emphasized as a dimension of knowing more dynamic and complete than mere cognition. But Edwards wants to emphasize that the happiness of a human being lies in perceiving and delighting in the beauty of God. He obviously aims to turn 'happiness' into an ontological principle by making it a key concept in his aesthetic theory. He accomplishes this by combining two fundamental ideas in his thought: (1) that the primary and essential element in 'true religion' consists in the positive affectional cognition of God; and (2), religion, taken in this sense, is the very purpose of the entire creation. When the two are combined in conjunction with his idealism 'happiness' emerges with ontological signification:

HAPPINESS IS THE END OF CREATION, as appears by this, because the creation had as good not be, as not rejoice in its being. For certainly it was the goodness of the Creator that moved him to create; and how can we conceive of another end proposed by goodness, than that he might delight in seeing the creatures he made rejoice in that being that he has given them?<sup>29</sup>

Underlying this 'M' entry is the philosophical association of happiness or 'pleasantness' with 'excellence' and beauty. This is in keeping with the whole Platonic and Augustinian tradition in which Edwards was reared.<sup>30</sup> That tradition held a real and even a necessary connection between goodness and a human being's desire and pleasure.<sup>31</sup> In Edwards' case, the basis for proceeding rests on the assumption that real beauty and real good 'are some one thing,' namely, proportion; which in the end is fundamental to the nature of being; it is the happiness in the 'consent to being'. He further supposes that the explanation why this one thing *is* beauty and goodness will also show why it pleases and satisfies minds. The explanation he furnishes states that they are in fact basic to being; they too are principles of ontology.

Recalling the distinction he makes in his theory of beauty between primary and secondary beauty, we remember that the two kinds of beauty pertain to the difference between

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<sup>28</sup> *Works*13, 199-200.

<sup>29</sup> 'M'3, *Works* 13, 200.

<sup>30</sup> See Plato, 'Symposium' in *Plato*, 201-12; Plotinus, *Enneads*, 1.6.1f; Augustine, *Confessions*, x, 20f.

<sup>31</sup> Anderson, 'EI', *Works*6, 81-82.



the spiritual (mental) and the natural (material) dimensions of reality. The kind of similarity or agreement that exists in primary beauty is the ‘consent’ (or love) between perceiving beings, while the agreement in secondary beauty is only an ‘image’ of spiritual consent. In Edwards, ‘consent’ or love is ‘the highest kind’ of *spiritual excellence*; it is a beauty that is ‘higher and happier’ than mere agreement among nonsentient things.<sup>32</sup> It follows that the consent that exists in God is the most beautiful (‘infinitely excellent’). Likewise, Edwards reasons that the happiness of a human being—who is a *spiritual* being at the top of the ‘great chain’ of created existences—lies in the perceiving of primary beauty: ‘The soul of man is spiritual and a spirit being requires a spiritual happiness.’<sup>33</sup>

He starts now only a couple of steps away from explaining how God uses happiness as an ontological principle in man to fulfill telic purposes. All that remains is to connect happiness with the tendency toward being and include ‘human being’ in God’s being. So he writes in ‘The Mind’, ‘being, if we examine narrowly, is nothing else but proportion,’ which means that there must be some kind of proportion or excellence basic to human being when ‘examined narrowly’. Such ‘excellence’ of being is nothing other than ‘the consent of being to its own being’, or the love a perceiving being has for its own existence. Which is to say, a human being’s happiness must, at the very least, consist of ‘the consent of being to its own being,’ just as he says in his summary on ‘Happiness’.<sup>34</sup> Thus, a human being necessarily consents to its own being because its happiness and beauty are internal to its being.

Edwards now easily and naturally turns the discussion toward God. God Himself is ‘the sum of all being’ in which all excellence is resolved. God prescribes glory for Himself through ‘the consent of being to its own being’ by designing inherent beauty and happiness in intelligent perceiving existence. Its happiness is a spiritual or mental happiness, and therefore of the highest order of excellence—being or proportion—by virtue of its ‘loving’ its own existence and, by default, the ‘sum of all being.’<sup>35</sup> Therefore (if we may conclude with Edwards), the happiness of human being is, at least in some respect, perceiving and rejoicing in bare existence (‘Being in general’ *qua* being). Such happiness is the first descriptive aesthetic/ontic relation of a being in his formula on ‘Happiness’.

The upshot of this metaphysical arrangement is manifold, but here I mention one implication to address McClymond’s concern for man’s ‘worth’. ‘Being’s consent to being’ is for Edwards an instance of ‘excellence’ and, therefore, being-as-manifest, i.e. God *ad extra*.<sup>36</sup> As an instance of excellence, man, whether sinful or not, has ‘value’ or ‘worth’ on the ‘great scale of being’, and may be regarded by God as an appropriate candidate for grace and mercy,

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<sup>32</sup> ‘The Mind’ 1, *Works*6, 336-38.

<sup>33</sup> Prov. 27:22 (1733).

<sup>34</sup> ‘The Mind’ 1, *Works*6, 338. Cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, x, 21.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 337, 338.

<sup>36</sup> Or, in the language of ‘The Mind’, it is the in-built beauty of ‘being consenting to its own being’ that intrinsically contributes to the ‘*ad extra*’ excellence of ‘being in general’ (God).



benevolent or complacent love, or whatever. For in regarding the creature's excellence, God really regards His own happiness, His own manifest excellence.<sup>37</sup> The *modus operandi* within *Two Dissertations* and the sermon *God Glorified* is precisely this premise: God is not only the cause of true virtue and being, but their *substance* and *source*.

If we shift the focus from man to God, we discover how Edwards metaphysically ensures God's glory with respect to human ontology. Bearing in mind that God's glory is not intermittent but manifest every moment in the creation ('M'gg, 1, 3, 87), the logic of Edwards' *End of Creation* teleology works out thus: All things have a God-glorifying purpose: there are some purposes ('subordinate ends') which lead to and terminate in other more significant and overarching purposes ('ultimate' and 'supreme ends'). Yet there is one purpose that remains constant that all other 'ends' presuppose and operate upon, namely, the *perception of existence*. If each moment of time is a God-empowered movement toward the 'ultimate end', then each moment existence is perceived must be an 'end' itself, a God-glorifying/replicating end. In Edwards' philosophical-theology human beings are purposely designed to do just that – perceive existence. In the perception of existence God is manifest; in His manifestation He is glorified. All human beings perceive existence; therefore all participate in God's replication.

The 'eerie silence' about the reprobate in *End of Creation* simply is not accurate. First, Edwards does not suppress his discussion about the 'damned' but makes open references in three sections. Second, many sections are applicable to the 'reprobate' even if they are not explicitly mentioned. Third, the *basic* 'end' of the present life of the reprobate is parallel to that of the elect Church: just as the redeemed in Christ 'manifest [God's] perfections,' so too the spatiotemporal life which the 'heathen' live is 'a manifesting or making known his divine greatness and excellency.'<sup>38</sup> The perception of excellence or, synonymously, existence, is the perceiving and *ad extra* replicating of God. Edwards leaves no room for doubt about this when he equates divine excellence (or being itself) with divine glory, and divine glory with God '*existing ad extra*.'<sup>39</sup> Thus, every intelligent thing that perceives existence participates in God's 'ultimate end'. This is why the conclusion of *End of Creation* (to cite McClymond) 'is written as though there were a single, eternal destiny for all humanity.' There is only one destiny for humanity—replicating God's perfections. Eternal punishment secures that destiny for those perfections the reprobate will 'remanate', just as heaven secures it for the elect.

Edwards does not launch into a lengthy discourse on the doctrine of reprobation because *End of Creation* was intended to serve as a catalyst to shift the Enlightenment conversation

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<sup>37</sup> Aquinas reasons that, 'Every being, as being, is good' and therefore may be considered of God's goodness (*Summa Theologia*, I, 5.3). JE says essentially the same thing but in aesthetic terminology.

<sup>38</sup> *Works*8, 522. Cf. Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 238-39 n. 107.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 527f.



away from a false discussion about man effecting his own destiny onto the historical reality of theocentric, spatiotemporal existence.

### 1.a. *One Kind of Human Being, Three Kinds of Dispositions*

But before proceeding, we must note that, for Edwards, man can only be placed in one of three ontological categories: concreated, fallen or ‘natural’ (in the sense of ‘natural-man’), and regenerate. According to Edwards, ‘our first parents’, Adam and Eve, were the only humans to have the status of ‘concreation’.<sup>40</sup> Post-lapsarian Adam, all of his posterity (excluding Jesus Christ), and the reprobate comprise the second set. And lastly, the spiritually restored or ‘born-again’ persons are the third. What is clear, however, is that, for Edwards, *these are different categories for human beings, not different kinds of ‘humans’*.

Additionally, whenever he speaks about what is essential to human being as such, that is, what fundamentally constitutes the essential dispositions in man,<sup>41</sup> the reference will always and primarily be to the first relational disposition and, secondarily, but not necessarily, the second relational disposition. As to the third relational disposition, it was in Adam in his creation, not as something that defined human being as such, though, indeed, it functioned as ‘a principle of nature’.<sup>42</sup> The Fall nullified this relational principle, and only spiritual regeneration restores it, not to make a human being a human being, but to relate directly (unite) a person to God through the Holy Spirit through a relationship of mutual consent.<sup>43</sup> (I shall have more to say on this later.)

Thus, *what all three ontological categories have in common* (and this speaks directly to Holmes’ concern about essentially different *kinds* of human beings) *is an essential disposition that tends toward its own existence*. This is what makes the one kind of human being a human being. It is man’s most basic ontic principle, a principle that ascribes inherent value to every person and metaphysically (or panentheistically) locates his or her existence in God’s being.

For Edwards, this first dispositional tendency functions as a human being’s intellectual and inclinational relationship to one’s self, a sort of immanent action, even the ‘happiness’ of

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<sup>40</sup> *Works3*, 381. See also JE’s discussion over-against John Taylor in *FW*, *Works1*, 340f. Concreation is the divine act of creating man’s constitution with an original righteous-ness, a creation *with* (con) righteousness. According to the Augustinian/Reformed view, man is said to have possessed the divine image by the fact of his creation, and not by a subsequent bestowal of it. By contrast, Pelagianism denies that holiness is concreated. It asserts that the will of man by creation, and in its first condition, is characterless. Its first act is to originate either holiness or sin. Generally speaking, the Tridentine anthropology is a mixture of Pelagianism and Augustinianism: God created man ‘*in puris naturalibus*,’ without holiness or sin. This creative act, which left man characterless, God followed with another act by which he endowed man with holiness.

<sup>41</sup> Usually in terms of ‘the soul’s essence’, ‘man’s being’, man’s essential ‘nature’ or ‘principles’. See, *Works2*, 188; *Works3*, 399-402; Deut. 32:4 (c.1727/8); and ‘Born Again’ (1731), *Works17*, 186-95.

<sup>42</sup> *Vid.* Chapter IV, §1.b, c.

<sup>43</sup> The general resurrection does not affect JE’s appraisal of ‘human being’ either. At the general resurrection, that which is essential to ‘human beings’ is either governed more perfectly by God so as to be sufficiently sanctified for His presence (as the case will be with the saints) or becomes ‘exceedingly loathsome and hateful’ (the damned). See Is. 33:17 (1736) and Mt. 10:28 (c.1733).



a being ‘consenting’ to its own being (not unlike God’s triunity). Self-relation, as the first and foremost ontic principle in man, possesses important implications for much of Edwards’ thought, not the least of which are his moral, harmatological, and soteriological theories.

But as the formula on ‘happiness’ indicates, human beings are also determined to relate to other beings through their knowledge and love of *them*.<sup>44</sup> In his dissertation, *The Nature of True Virtue*, Edwards writes that by ‘a law of nature which God has fixed’ human beings are capable of knowing and loving the ‘*secondary beauty*’ that makes up the inner structure of all created beings: such is the function of the second relational principle of human being—to ‘consent to [other] being[s]’. The reason secondary beauty delights human beings lies in its correspondence with *primary beauty*, which is purely mental, moral, and spiritual; in a word, it is ‘Being in general’.<sup>45</sup> Secondary beauty images forth, shadows, and mirrors primary beauty as ‘being-as-manifest’; for it lacks the *direct mutual consent* between minds, which is the highest form of excellence or being. Like the disposition of self-love, *the disposition of other relation is essential and determinative to human being, as well*.

Originally, human beings were created with a third disposition to *directly* relate to the whole or God Himself, by knowing and loving His beauty, the *primary beauty*—the principle in harmony with which all finite beings are created.<sup>46</sup> A man, then, truly knows and loves himself and others only if he knows them through a relationship with God’s beauty: ‘a natural [man] may love others, but ’tis some way or other as appendages and appurtenances to himself,’ writes Edwards, ‘but a spiritual man loves others as of God, or in God, or some way related to Him.’<sup>47</sup> Regenerate persons have this disposition by supernatural restoration. No one since the Fall, however, is created with it (save for Jesus Christ).

In Edwards’ ontology, the three principles of self-love (self-relation), other-relation, and God-relation are the basic orientations of the entire self, which operate in, as, and through, the intellectual and the inclinational activities. The first principle is foundational and definitive to ‘human being’; likewise, the second organically belongs to ‘human being’ as such; but, while the third relation substantiates the existence of a human being, it does not define ‘human being’ as such, nor does it necessarily belong to man’s essential composition. The extent of a human being’s intellectual and inclinational participation, or perhaps, ‘consent,’ in each of these internal relations reflect not only their ‘value’ and place on the ‘scale of being’, but also the kind of participation they have in God’s self-glorifying scheme: for God is glorified in a different manner through each of these relational dimensions. As man’s ‘happiness’ increases, certain dynamics of God’s perfections ‘enlarge’ through replication, in accordance with Edwards’ idealistic principles of perception and existence. Alternatively, a man with merely

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<sup>44</sup> Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 86.

<sup>45</sup> *Works*8, 570-75.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *M*821, *Works*18, 532-33.



fractional consent, limited happiness, and, therefore, comparatively diminished substantiality, replicates other dynamics only remotely associated with consenting participation.

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The formula on happiness is a reductionistic statement about the existence of intelligent perceiving being. When unpacked, it discloses how God fashions the internal ontological dispositions of human beings to pursue that which is, according to Edwards' definition in *Freedom of the Will*, the most apparent good (or, aesthetically, the most beautiful or agreeable to being) and, simultaneously, the divine purposes of self-replication.

Behind all of his ruminations on excellence and happiness lies divine beauty or God's beautiful being. For Edwards, it is the ultimate reality that constitutes the aesthetic and ontological matrix of *all* perceivable realities. God's beauty also contextualizes the 'simple equalities' of secondary beauty to give them reference and meaning. Furthermore, it facilitates an *IPB*'s participation in primary beauty through a mental or spiritual relation/union (which, in turn, substantiates being). In short, it is what the aesthetics of happiness, relation, and excellence, are resolved into, namely, proportion or being.

## ***2. The Consent of Being to its own Being: Self-love and the Relation to Self***

Long before Edwards set out to write his major polemical treatises against deism and incipient Arminianism, indeed, even before he set down to defend the Great Awakening through an innovative articulation of the psychology of religious conversion, he had already settled upon a philosophical anthropology; the whole of which was based upon a dispositional theory of internal relations. His early-established philosophy of being gave him well defined principles to differentiate between the marks of true and false conversions, determine how God achieves His 'ends' through man's nature, contrast 'common virtue' with 'true virtue', defend the doctrines of original sin and progressive sanctification, and refute 'prevailing notions of that freedom of the will'. Because his ontology was already in place, all the hallmarks of his later treatises were standard fare within his preaching ministry before the first page of his writing went to press in July 1731.<sup>48</sup>

If the essay on 'Excellency' is the mine from which Edwards extracts the theological and philosophical implications of his ontology, then the formula on 'happiness' is its core. Of the three dispositional relations contained within that core, the relation of a given sentient entity

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<sup>48</sup> See (in order), Mt. 15:26 (1729); 'God Glorified in Man's Dependence' (1730), *Works*17, 200-14; 'Serving God in Heaven' (1731), *Works*17, 253-61; Mt. 5:22 (1726) and 1Pet. 1:15 (1726); and 'The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost' (1729), *Works*14, 375-436. The 'M' entries written before the July 1731 publication of *God Glorified* (viz. nos. aa-497) also give ample evidence to this assertion.



to itself is the most important feature of his theory of human nature and the analysis of that nature.<sup>49</sup> It is what makes a human being a human being; it is the essence of man's *imago Dei*.

Yet the law of the whole regulates even this idea. For an entity's relation to itself is only a part within the whole, an instance of being within the network of interrelated existences. Edwards' theocentrism ensures that priority and emphasis will always be given to the whole, especially in matters of ontology, because the whole bespeaks of God. Thus, it is only when we step back and look at the part's place within the grand design of existence that we clearly see how God is active in that particular existence or group of existences for the glorification of Himself, as well as something of that being's (group's) specific telic function in creation.

With respect to human beings, the metaphysics behind Edwards' telic-theocentricity focuses on a principle of '*self-love*', a concept that emerges as the central component in his ontology. In fact, self-love is the ethical translation of the metaphysical expression 'the consent of being to its own being', which makes it the most important feature of his philosophical anthropology.<sup>50</sup>

But my claim that Edwards identifies a human being's first and essential dispositional tendency with a concept of self-love raises several questions, and even revives the same ones answered in the preceding section. For instance, if Edwards' concept of self-love is tantamount to the *imago Dei* and, therefore, worthy of the divine benediction (Gen. 1:31), then does that not put him at odds with Calvin, who called for the eradication of all self-love, as well as his own Calvinist heritage? Furthermore, how does self-love factor into the panentheism spoken of earlier; that is, how can creaturely self-love be something beautiful in the Creator's being? Furthermore, we ask: What is self-love's relation to the psychological constitution and personal identity of man? What place does it hold in his moral theory? We turn to a further examination of the three relational dispositions to answer these questions.

## **2.a. Solomon Stoddard, The Calvinist Tradition, and the Idea of Principle Self-Love**

The 'Miscellanies' and 'The Mind' notebooks make it clear that, prior to Dec. 1723, Edwards had already settled upon a relational conception of the Trinity. Yet, it is my contention that it was not until his exposure to Solomon Stoddard's philosophy of the natural-man that he began to understand man's nature and being in conjunction with a self-loving *disposition*.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Although angelic beings could be included in this statement and much of the foregoing discussion, yet my intention is to focus on human beings. Thus I will commonly exclude reference to angels.

<sup>50</sup> In some respect 'being's consent to its own being' could be subsumed under the third determinative relation of being, 'the consent to being in general'. For, as I show below, 'the consent of being to its own being' is, in the final analysis, a consent to God, albeit indirectly and without *mutual consent*. Nonetheless, JE allows for a self-conscious being (specifically, natural-man) to directly oppose ('dissent from') 'Being in general' (as with, say, a malignant atheist), and yet exist. Therefore it is appropriate for JE to treat self-relation as a distinct (though not a totally separate) relation in the nexus.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 151-53, 159 n. 23. Stoddard (1643-1729), renowned as the 'Pope of the Connecticut Valley,' was a native of Boston and a graduate of Harvard (1662), where he later served as



This idea combined with the modeling of man's psychological constitution upon the trinity of divine knowledge, love, and joy (vis-à-vis Mather)<sup>52</sup> constitutes Edwards' basic ontological principles for man. Whether Edwards learnt Stoddard's 'philosophy' indirectly from his father Timothy Edwards or Stoddard's published sermons is not certain, though the latter is most likely. However this may be, Edwards took the Stoddardean idea that 'a spirit of self-love' accounts for the moral inclinations and volitions of humanity—good or evil—and made further application by maintaining that it also accounts for the first and most fundamental relational dimension of the nexus of laws comprising a human being's ontological structure. Which is to say, Edwards believed that the relation to self, the idea of the activity of a lawlike disposition of self-love, accounts for the primary ontological 'what-ness' of human being. However, this does not preclude a concept of *substance*, but constitutes it in nearly the same way that God's idea of Himself is His essence. For Edwards, it is this same 'what-ness' of being for man that glorifies God in a basic aesthetic sense.

### 2.a.i. 'The best philosophy I have ever met'

The context in which Edwards discloses his most fruitful resource for the analyzing of the natural-man surrounds a number of 'M' entries on the Fall of Adam, sin, and original sin. For this reason he writes, 'The best philosophy that I have met with of original sin and all sinful inclinations, habits and principles, is undoubtedly that of Mr. Stoddard's'.<sup>53</sup> Although Edwards makes this disclosure in a 1727 discussion on the Fall of Adam and sinful inclinations, yet his employment of Stoddard's 'philosophy' in a variety of settings antedates this entry by at least three years, during which time it gains certain metaphysical attribution for a wider range of usages.<sup>54</sup>

An autumn 1723 sermon on 1 Corinthians 2:14, published as *A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate*, contains Edwards' first clear attempt to utilize Stoddard's philosophy in conjunction with his own aesthetic ruminations on excellency from 'The Mind'. The Corinthians sermon appears to be product of culminating thoughts from

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College librarian. In Nov. 1669, Stoddard received the call to the Northampton Church and departed for the western frontier where he was ordained (Sept. 1672) and remained until his death. He exercised considerable influence within the region's congregational churches through the Hampshire Association, which he helped to form in 1714. The story of the intimate relationship between JE and his maternal grandfather need not be rehearsed here. Stoddard's influence upon JE's piety and, perhaps to a lesser degree, his thought is indisputable. Aside from the personal access to Stoddard, which JE's associate position at Northampton afforded, JE had from before his time at Yale ready access to all of Stoddard's writings, published and unpublished.

<sup>52</sup> Compare Cotton Mather's *Blessed Unions* (Boston, 1692), *passim*, or *Religio Philosophica* (London, 1721), 301.

<sup>53</sup> 'M'301, *Works*13, 387; cf. Rom. 7:14 (1730).

<sup>54</sup> Ramsey believes that JE held Stoddard's philosophy on sinful inclinations from his mid-twenties (1727-28) ('EI', *Works*8, 252-53 n. 1). Such a late date, however, overlooks the fact that from late 1723, several of JE's sermons and 'M' entries identify the natural and supernatural principles in man with self-love and divine love respectively.



‘The Mind’, a series of ‘*M*’ exploring the ontology of the Trinity and principles of nature,<sup>55</sup> as well as reflections on Stoddard’s philosophy of natural and infused principles. All of these items were written within the space of a few months, revealing that, at the time, Edwards was well occupied with testing the ontological soundness of his theory of excellence through applications in the spheres of theology, soteriology, and ethics. Stoddard’s theory concerning the principles within man appeared to Edwards as a complementary way to explain how the significant aesthetic and moral elements of his ontology could be synthesized and harmonized with an ‘orthodox’ biblical anthropology.<sup>56</sup> In the end, its contribution to Edwards’ final theory provided a useful explanation of man’s role within the world and, secondly, how man’s being could likewise be conceived in lawlike dispositional terms. The importance of Stoddard’s theory, then, lies in its contribution to extending Edwards’ telic-oriented perspective on the world to human beings, which in turn gave it an internal coherence.

In his analysis of the Corinthians sermon, Kenneth P. Minkema suggests Edwards may have derived his well-known analogy of the ‘sweetness of honey’, as well as the differentiation between the unregenerate and regenerate based upon natural verses ‘infused’ principles, from Stoddard’s *Three Sermons Lately Preach’d at Boston* (Boston, 1717).<sup>57</sup> Corroborative evidence reinforces this suggestion. Prior to the composition of this sermon, Edwards’ philosophical anthropology appears noticeably undeveloped. From the first of his extant sermons in the autumn 1720 up to the spring of 1723, he makes no significant advance concerning the essence and nature of man. Furthermore, what becomes in his later writings the familiar language of ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural, ‘inferior’ and ‘superior principles’ is noticeably absent. The exception is the several entries on ‘RELIGION’, which further Edwards’ philosophical idealism and link the teleological purposes of man with human existence. Yet after Edwards discovers Stoddard’s ‘philosophy’ in the *Treatise Concerning Conversion* and particularly *Three Sermons* (which I suggest occurred during the end of his New York pastorate),<sup>58</sup> he explicitly begins to speak of man’s nature and the influence of the Holy Spirit in terms of natural or infused *principles*.<sup>59</sup> These ‘principles’ quickly become associated with

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<sup>55</sup> Viz. ‘*M*’73, 77, 87, 92, 93, 94, 96, 98 (see *Works13*).

<sup>56</sup> As codified in the subordinate standards that JE would have deemed biblical, viz. the *Westminster Standards* and *Savoy Declaration*.

<sup>57</sup> Minkema (Ed.), *Works14*, 67, 76 n.9. The Corinthians sermon itself is the homiletical product of ‘*M*’ 73 and 77. JE may also (or instead) have had in mind Locke’s ‘pineapple’ illustration.

<sup>58</sup> During the New York pastorate, as well as the interim before the Bolton, Conn. charge, JE spent time preparing his M.A. dissertation, *Quaestio* (an essay on the nature of justification), and ‘reading religious books’ and ‘sermons’ (*Works16*, 772-74). His close proximity to East Windsor (where he spent his time after the New York period) would have provided easy access to his father’s library, which contained Stoddard’s *Treatise* and *Three Sermons* (Minkema, ‘The Edwardses’, 646-66).

<sup>59</sup> The first sermon in which JE speaks of the Holy Ghost ‘governing’ man as ‘a vital principle of true holiness’ is Luke 13:5 (*Works10*, 515). Written close to the same time, the sermon on John 6:68, explicitly states that this principle of holiness is a ‘infused grace’ (526). The sermon on Hag. 1:5 makes a distinction between inherent principles within man and a principle of love to God, which JE identifies with the Holy Ghost. And finally, within the two unit sermon on Phil. 1:21, JE clearly identifies the



the natural or essential being of man – a principle of self-love, and the nonessential ‘indwelling principle of holiness’, i.e. the Holy Spirit united to the soul, influencing it ‘as a real, spiritual, active and vital—yea, immortal’ principle.<sup>60</sup>

### 2.a.ii. *Divergent streams of Self-Love*

The crux of Stoddard’s moral philosophy was this: there are two types of self-love, holy or lawful self-love and sinful or inordinate self-love. His explication of a divergent pair of self-loves was a conscious re-affirmation of Augustine’s eudaimonism. While such an assertion departed from Calvin, who replaced the Augustinian emphasis on *true* self-love and well-being with a non-teleological abandonment to God’s will, it nonetheless proved faithful to the authoritative Puritan thought of Perkins, Ames, and Watson, all of whom affirmed the basic theme of ‘proper’ self-love and denounced ‘improper’ self-love.<sup>61</sup>

Reiterating the general idea of this Augustinian-eudaimonistic wing of Reformed thought, Stoddard stated that a holy or lawful self-love is a principle of grace and, therefore, not a collective or inherent characteristic of fallen human nature. Consequently, natural-man lives incapable of virtuous love to God or others.<sup>62</sup> However, both principles were present in Adam while he maintained a moral and ontological integrity. Stoddard did not explain, however, the ontological significance of self-love in either Adam or his posterity; he simply states: ‘There is much of a spirit of self-love in man.’<sup>63</sup>

Edwards, on the other hand, found a use for self-love that Stoddard and his Puritan forbearers never employed. Indeed, he applied variations of this ‘philosophy’ well beyond the subject of lapsarian man: it found its way into his discussions on original righteousness, the *imago Dei*, the ontological and epistemological dissimilarity between regenerates and unregenerates, aesthetics, and, prominently, his ethical theory. However, its most important usage was to elucidate human nature. For Edwards, more than anything else it functioned as a unifying principle around which the teleological, moral, and aesthetic aspects of human

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‘natural self’ with ‘that false, inordinate, irregular, mistaken self-love, whereby we seek to please ourselves and none else’ (569). Still, it is within the 1Cor. 2:14 sermon that JE begins to designate regularly and explicitly the essential disposition of self-love in man as the ontic ‘natural principle’ and the holy and spiritual aspect of humanity as the ‘supernatural principle,’ i.e. the Holy Spirit.

Although absent from ‘M’34 ‘ORIGINAL SIN’ (July 1723?), yet the idea is implicitly found in ‘M’89 and 117, written only months later (the principal subjects of these entries chiefly relate to the ontological Trinity). ‘M’123’ continues the idea of an epistemological distinction between regenerates and unregenerates, with JE now regularly explaining in terms of holiness, excellency of principles, and beauty, that their epistemic disparity results from different ontological statuses and organization.

<sup>60</sup> *Works*10, 569, 474.

<sup>61</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III.7.1. See, for instance, Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (London, 1692), 13-24 and William Ames, *Medulla SS. Theologica* (Amsterdam, 1623), 250f. JE would have been well versed in Ames’ *Medulla* (an autographed copy annotated by JE in 1721 is part of the Beinecke collection), Perkins’ *Works* (JE quotes and refers to Perkins as ‘The famous Mr. Perkins’ in *RA*), and Watson’s *Body* (cited in Yale catalog of 1715). All were standard New England fare.

<sup>62</sup> Stoddard, ‘That Natural Men are under the Government of Self-Love’ in *Three Sermons*, 34-64.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.



existence were discussed and elucidated. Thus, where Stoddard was content to speak of self-love as a ‘course of life,’ Edwards went deeper to express the self-love in man as an essential *habitus*, or disposition. The disposition of self-love ‘is the nature of the soul to crave and thirst after well-being.’<sup>64</sup> What Stoddard lent to Edwards, then, was not a modern dispositional philosophy, but a succinct and appropriate analysis—from within the Reformed tradition—of the active tendency in human beings that corresponded nicely with Calvinistic doctrines of total depravity, soteriology, and the nature of God, to name a few. What Edwards did with the Augustinian-Stoddardean philosophy of self-love was to make it more basic to man: the primary disposition for a human being is a lawlike disposition of self-love.

Edwards’ metaphysically charged notion of self-love is not what moral philosophers commonly call psychological egoism,<sup>65</sup> nor should it be understood as an agent’s predominant aim at individual, private satisfaction.<sup>66</sup> Certainly Edwards has a place in his thought for altruistic virtue motivated by disinterested self-love, as well as for what Gene Outka calls an ‘acquisitive’ self-love, that completely reprehensible self-love of Reinhold Niebuhr, who historically linked self-love, pride, and sin to the core of human depravity.<sup>67</sup> But in this context, Edwards intends something much more fundamental than identifying self-love with some arbitration of conscience or a moral theory of psychological egoism in which ‘acquisitive’ self-love constitutes *de facto* the sole spring of behavior, identical for every man. To be sure, when he deals with the depravity of the natural-man he will descriptively say that, at the deepest level, all moral aims and determinations are reducible to ‘acquisitive’ self-love.<sup>68</sup> Instead, he is making an important *ontological* statement: the primary disposition and defining characteristic of human beingness is a self-loving/self-preserving disposition. That is, the soul’s distinguishing nature *and* essence is an active lawlike disposition which tends in the first place toward self-preserving,<sup>69</sup> or, in the abstruse metaphysical language of ‘The Mind’, ‘being’s being is the consent or inclining to being’; or again, ‘being consenting to its own being’. Hence, Edwards’ assertion: ‘The *nature* of the soul Endeavours to support itself.’<sup>70</sup> Which is to say, the essential *habitus* of the soul is in some sense self-promoting.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Banner-Works*, 2:81.

<sup>65</sup> Psychological egoism, as distinguished from *ethical egoism*, is not a normative ethical theory of the ‘right and good’ so much as a theory about human motivation. JE’s ethical theory certainly embodies most of the major tenets of psychological egoism, but as I argue here, it is also, and in the first place for JE, an essential ontic principle for man – the lawlike activity of ‘being consenting to its own being’.

<sup>66</sup> Outka, *Agape*, 56-57.

<sup>67</sup> Niebuhr, *Man’s Nature and His Communities*. JE discusses both types of self-love in *TV*.

<sup>68</sup> Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 118. As an ethical phenomenon, self-love is an important, though complex concept in JE’s ethical theory. He offers three types of love (simple, compounded, holy) with further distinctions among these (benevolence, complacency), all of which bear on his ethical analysis of self-love, which itself is a pivotal concept in his distinction between common morality and *true* virtue.

<sup>69</sup> See *RA (Works2)*, 108), where JE explains that fear arises from self-love, as well as their connection to self-preservation.

<sup>70</sup> Is. 33:14 (1730), 12.



Edwards reconfigures self-love in such a way that it can no longer be confined to an ethical theory. He requires its recognition as (primarily) a principle of human nature with derivative ethical implications. Self-love, therefore, certainly belongs to his ethical theory, but as a consequence of his philosophy of being. Like Augustine, whose use of self-love held an important if not central place in his theological and metaphysical convictions, so too Edwards' theory of self-love possesses salient metaphysical and theological signification.<sup>72</sup>

### 3. *Theocentric Influences*

'Mr. Stoddard's philosophy' is not the sole contributing factor to Edwards' conception of human being. Setting aside biblical propositions, the Puritan tradition, and even John Locke's important concept of the self's reflexive or introspective experience of internal acts for the moment,<sup>73</sup> Edwards' own theocentricity plays a major role in his ontological considerations of man's essential being. This is where I wish to concentrate our attention for the present.

Edwards' theocentricity influences his ontology in at least three respects. First, it dictates that the most fundamental and defining principle of human existence immediately relates to the glory of God (Edwards' characteristic 'theocentrism of ends'). Second, God's being itself serves as the ontological archetype for man. Third, the relational structure of Edwards' ontological and psychological Trinity serves as the model for the internal dispositional and psychological structure of human beings. We shall consider each point in turn.

#### 3.a. *Instances of Excellence*

In the first place, God designs human existence to glorify Himself through a telic prescription that grounds 'human being' in divine 'excellency'. Grounding human being in God's beautiful being serves four purposes: (a) it answers the question of how God encompasses created minds and concludes the question of how 'God comprehends all being'; (b) it

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<sup>71</sup> Note that this is considerably stronger than Hume's contention that such things as 'self-love, or the resentment of injuries' are inherent in human nature (*Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding*, 22). Hume's main concern was to assimilate moral philosophy to natural philosophy. In moral philosophy Hume follows Hutcheson in representing our moral judgments as founded on the operations of a sovereign 'moral sense'. These (like natural phenomena) are expressions of a 'feeling', itself largely governed by habit or custom and not subordinate to reason. So while Hume was an incisive critic of natural religion and deism, arguing that man is determined not by his perceptions (Locke) but by his behavioral modes – in the case of religion, by fear and hope –, which should be analyzed psychologically, JE instead argues that behavior modes are ontic and consequently, due to the *analogia entis* and *imago Dei*, are directly related to reason and not the affections alone. A self-love disposition in JE is more basic – it is a vital component of the nexus of dispositions that make a human being a human being.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-love in St. Augustine*.

<sup>73</sup> See Locke, *Essay*, bk. 2, 1, 1-5.



provides a statement about what is shared by *all* human beings, whether concreated or fallen, elect or reprobate, regenerate or unregenerate; (c) it shows how every individual, regardless of salvific status, every moment fulfills a God-glorifying purpose by their bare existence; and (d) (to be treated in subsection 3.b.) it secures man's intrinsic 'worth', on account of which God may have 'regard' to him.

(a) When Edwards applies his ontological axiom from 'EXCELLENCY', 'being is proportion or excellency', to 'perceiving being' or 'spirits', the conclusion emerges that the highest excellency and, therefore, the greatest 'degree' of proportion, consists in the consent of spirits 'one to another' or the mutual consent of 'being to being'. The reason equality or the beauty of proportion pleases the mind and inequality displeases is because disproportion or inconsistency contradicts mental existence, i.e. proportionality. Proportionality may then be understood as the aesthetic equivalence of mental consent, which, for Edwards, *is* being. The upshot means that every intelligent existence is, to one 'degree' or another, an entity of excellence or, synonymously, an instance of proportion or a consenting being.<sup>74</sup>

Having established his metaphysic, he makes the turn toward panentheistic inclusivity: if God is *Ens Entium* and 'the sum of all being', then any and all human beings are comprehended by 'Being in general' ('M'1077). Which is to say, at the most basic level of existence for 'perceiving being' or 'spirits', God is the sum; or, in other words, God's own existence envelopes their excellence or proportionality and, in fact, may be said to comprise it.<sup>75</sup> As Edwards states it, 'consent to entity and consent to God are the same, because God is the general and only proper entity of all things.'<sup>76</sup>

Edwards not only subsumes all things beneath the blanket of God's comprehensiveness, but in equating being with excellence he renders all *IPMs* aspects of God's beautiful being, the matrix of existence. Since human being is so inextricably bound up with 'Being in general' (God *ad extra*), it is not difficult to see how, in Edwards' philosophical-theology, God wields sovereign control over creation. (The inherent ontological excellence of the natural-man and reprobate are obvious inferences here.) Matters of salvation, providence, and

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<sup>74</sup> In 'The Mind' 64, JE explains: 'Excellency may be distributed into greatness and beauty. The former is the degree of being the latter is being's consent to being' (*Works6*, 382).

<sup>75</sup> 'The Mind' 15, *Works6*, 345. Though it was explained earlier that the most important implication of JE's definition of excellency is the claim that every real being must, as a condition of its reality, stand in some relation to other things, and even to all other things, yet a soul may exist even if it directly dissents from other entities and 'Being in general.' The possibility of the existence of an *IPB*, which consents only to its own being, is explained by the 'natural agreeableness' of *IPB* consenting to be. To JE, the contrary is an ontological inconsistency. A being that only consents directly to its own being must exist, for its dissent to other relations assumes their and God's existence. According to JE, dissent is 'not to nothing' but to something, namely, another intelligent mind. Thus, the existence of an entity is determined positively (via consent to being), negatively (through dissent), and necessarily, by virtue of the interconnectedness of existence within the network or matrix of being (see *Works6*, 365-66).

<sup>76</sup> 'M'117, *Works13*, 283. Cf. *Works6*, 337; *TV*, *Works8*, 541.



causality, are easily interpreted as God, as it were, asserting His *ad extra* Self to move the matrix of existence closer to its 'ultimate end'.

(b) In Edwards' eyes God is glorified not only by 'comprehending universal existence,' but also by created intelligent being's 'consent to its own being'. Though 'Being in general' is not the *direct* object of *mutual consent*, nonetheless the Divine Being receives 'consent', strictly considered, as the 'sum of all being.' Why does created intelligent being 'consent to its own being' and thereby consent to 'Being in general'? The answer for Edwards is simple: God designed it that way, not out of necessity, but because it suited the divine prerogative.<sup>77</sup>

Here enter Edwards' telic-oriented dispositions once again. In this arrangement, the essential and lawlike disposition of 'human being' does not consent, but it *is* the consent. Man, that is, *all* men, do not simply consent to being by accident, evolution, or autonomous choice; rather they are designed by God to do so through a lawlike disposition directed toward a specific end, 'consent to being'. So, for any given man to exist is for him to inescapably consent to 'Being in general' *qua* being. For without 'being's consent to its own being', a human being would theoretically be contrary to its own being and cease to exist.<sup>78</sup> That is, it would not have the disposition that distinguishes 'human being' as such. It is important to note that *Edwards does not restrict this disposition to the elect; it belongs to every human being every moment of their existence as an essential and defining feature of their humanity*. God in-builds the plurality of excellence (relational consent) into all manifest being, and thereby secures the externalizing of His being. Man, therefore, whether regenerate or not, is inescapably related to God through a divinely contrived disposition of consent to being.

If we ask what distinctive ways self-love exercises a lawlike disposition, Edwards surprisingly replies that, in addition to 'perceiving and willing being,' it functions in a manner similar to matter. The being of an atom, we recall, is the activity of 'resistance,' so that, solidity, indivisibility, and resisting annihilation are, for Edwards, the same thing. Being and persevering, then, is akin to a *self-preserving activity*.<sup>79</sup> So, too, a human being's existence is promoted by a self-loving disposition exercised in self-preservation. Within Edwards' ontology for *IPB*, there is the linking of self-love with self-preservation: quite simply, self-love includes a notion of self-preservation.<sup>80</sup> The self-love disposition not only (negatively) resists annihilation: '[Man's] soul abhors annihilation, wherein it must be discontinued'; but also (positively) inclines to be: 'Man was created with a propensity, that is, a disposition and capacity proportionate to the happiness intended for him.'<sup>81</sup> So while the ontological reality of

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<sup>77</sup> 'M'1263, *PJE*, 184-87.

<sup>78</sup> 'The Mind' 1 and 45, *Works6*, 337, 362-63; 'M'99, *Works13*, 267.

<sup>79</sup> 'Of Atoms', *Works6*, 211.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 192. Where Richard Dawkins might attribute a propensity toward self-preservation to a gene (*The Selfish Gene*, 36), JE would attribute it to an essential disposition.

<sup>81</sup> 'M'99, *Works13*, 268.



the self-love disposition is ideal, yet, Edwards treats it as an *activity*, consent – the consequence of a lawlike disposition. In sum, this lawlike active tendency consents and regards being: what it does characterizes what it is.

God, however, stands as the architect who ensures that dispositions function in accord with His purposes. According to Edwards, all the exercises of the power and activities of sentient beings—*their active tendencies*—are but God’s continual and immediate influence. Whether atoms or events, all emerge from the immediate operation of God. So it must have seemed entirely reasonable to Edwards to say that the active tendency of moral agents ‘is nothing but God’s influencing the soul according to a certain law of nature.’ The ‘law of nature’ of which he speaks is nothing other than the divinely-established disposition of self-love/self-regard. Thus, God remains the sole causal agent and, inasmuch as a perceiving being is an idea, that is to say, excellent mental existence, He also comprehends it. God, therefore, is glorified ‘according to certain *rules of proportion*’, which He Himself teleologically establishes in all human beings alike.<sup>82</sup>

(c) For Edwards, an entity’s ‘consent to being’ constitutes mental excellence and, therefore, it exhibits an instance of ‘*ad extra*’ divine beauty. God is glorified through such instances of excellence; the whole of which comprises the matrix of created existence, the matrix of divine beauty. As long as a human being exists—which, according to the ‘religious’ purpose of creation, they will forever—this instance of excellence is manifest.<sup>83</sup> And since it is the principal lawlike disposition of ‘human being’ *en bloc*, every perceivable moment some instance of God obtains an *ad extra* manifestation. This, Edwards believes, will continue into eternity or else God’s manifest glory ‘be altogether in vain that it was’, because the eternal purposes of God require conscious beings.<sup>84</sup> Therefore it follows that man must immortally and eternally perceive God. We must bear in mind that beauty is not an abstracted concept for Edwards; it is his word for what human beings consent to in existence – ‘Being in general’.

In this, Edwards essentially combines nuanced elements of the Augustinian-Stoddardean position on self-love with aesthetic rudiments from Shaftesbury’s moral philosophy to (i) produce a distinctly dispositional conception of man, and (ii) bring the whole under his operating principle of telic-theocentricity.

But here Edwards turns Shaftesbury’s ideas inside-out, or rather, outside-in. In response to the theory of psychological egoism indicative of Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Mandeville, Shaftesbury proposed a phenomenological description of the human encounter with beauty to account for ethical behavior. He believed the ‘moral sense’, a mental faculty unique to us that involves reflection and feeling and constitutes our ability to discern right from wrong, was

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 267. Emphasis mine.

<sup>83</sup> ‘M’gg, *Works*13, 185.

<sup>84</sup> ‘M’1, *Works*13, 197.



analogous to a purported ‘aesthetic sense’, a special capacity by which we perceive, through our emotions, the ‘proportions and harmonies’ of which, on his Platonic view, beauty is composed. Additionally, Shaftesbury believed every creature has a ‘private good or interest,’ an end to which it is naturally disposed by its constitution. The ‘end’ corresponds to empirical factors, namely, what is perceived to be beautiful, harmonious, and excellent. These ideas resonated with Edwards, but required reordering so as to make them agreeable with his understanding of Christian anthropology, not humanistic optimism or naturalism.

Edwards would say that moral distinctions do not issue from the natural world, nor does morality exist independently of theistic religion, as Shaftesbury and Hutcheson believed. As a non-naturalist, he maintains that moral distinctions are internal and spiritual, absolute and foundational. But what is more, he believes that it is the Divine Being that stands as the beauty of aesthetic. So, once Edwards naturalized Shaftesbury’s external ‘proportions and harmonies’ and making them ontological designations grounded in God’s being, then he was only one step removed from his Augustinian-Stoddardean position concerning self-love. For him, ‘excellence’ is not so much an idea produced in us when we experience pleasure upon thinking of certain natural objects or artifacts, nor is it analogous to Lockean secondary qualities. Instead, excellence is ontic: what Shaftesbury and Hutcheson denominate a ‘moral’ or ‘aesthetic sense’ is really an instance of excellence itself, viz. a lawlike disposition given (internally) to consent to existence (‘Being in general’).<sup>85</sup> Morality is not determined by what flows into an agent and is perceived by a moral or aesthetic sense. Instead, it is a matter of what an agent’s inner disposition manifests.

### **3.b. *Imago Dei and the analogia entis***

The second influence of Edwards’ theocentrism becomes apparent in the correlation he draws between ‘the deity subsisting in the prime, unoriginated, and most absolute manner’ and the inner logic of man’s essence.<sup>86</sup> Here Edwards imputes his conception of God’s ideal essence to man, so that an analogy of being may be established and man’s ontological ‘worth’ may be grounded in the ‘excellence’ of mental existence. That is, having achieved a satisfactory Trinitarian ontology, Edwards moves outward from this absolute center of being (God) to explain the being of man in accord with the divine archetype.<sup>87</sup>

Holmes and McClymond fail to acknowledge that neither Edwards’ theocentrism nor his understanding of the *imago Dei* allows for an alternative ontological model for man in the sense that there could be competing, unrelated structures of being. The possibility of there being two essentially separate kinds of human beings is never an option for Edwards. The

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<sup>85</sup> See Holbrook, *Ethics of JE*, c. 8.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Essay on the Trinity’, *Treatise*, 108.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Plantinga-Pauw, ‘The Supreme Harmony of All’, c. 4. That moving from God to man in the sphere of ontology was JE’s expressed method, see *Works*6, 388 and ‘M’91, 94, 96 in *Works*13.



upshot is that the basic, non-theological ‘worth’ or ‘value’ that God regards in every man, from Adam to Judas to Mother Theresa, is the same. The determination of man’s ‘value’ is metaphysically based on the ‘excellence’—which God comprehends—in-built to being. Thus, God’s regard for *all* human life, from the greatest sinner to the most sanctified saint, is really a regard for His own beautiful being *ad extra*.<sup>88</sup>

God’s essence is the idea of Himself, while the content of that idea consists of ‘essential knowing’ and ‘loving’.<sup>89</sup> As Richard Weber explains, this forms the heart of Edwards’ metaphysical formulation of the Trinity.<sup>90</sup> Correspondingly, when Edwards contemplates the essence of man he has in mind (i) the metaphysical notion that mental ‘substance’ consists in idea, and (ii) the idea that the first relation of the divine essence to itself—‘knowing’ (the Son) and ‘loving’ (the Spirit) the primordial Divine Being (the Father), or divine self-love/self-regard—serves as the archetype of a human being’s essential *habitus*.

According to Edwards, the Father’s idea of Himself includes a necessary disposition toward knowing and loving Himself. This disposition is *of* and *in* that one idea God has of Himself: it is a kind of reflexivity built into the very nature of God’s ‘self’. The Father, however, is the irreducible and inexplicable source of that idea which consists of a disposition to know and love ‘the essence of the Godhead in its first subsistence’<sup>91</sup> Translated into the relational terms of excellency, the first relation of God is to His own being – there is no further reduction of being than God’s idea of Himself; it is the Deity in its irreducible, direct existence.<sup>92</sup> Edwards carries this same rational pattern of *a priori* thought into his consideration of man: there is no more antecedent principle for a ‘human being’ other than its *essential idea* of being *a self* that exists. How that idea is (i) manifest in the matrix of existence and (ii) becomes conscious of itself and (iii) even perpetuates, as it were, its own existence, is through the dispositional knowledge and love of its (derivative) being. This is what Edwards calls ‘essential’ or ‘natural self-love.’<sup>93</sup>

Conscious that such an account of God may engender ‘improper’ perspectives on God’s self-love (i.e. charges of selfishness), Edwards warns against conceiving of it as ‘common’. By common self-love he means the ‘vulgar’ and ‘inordinate’ selfish self-love generally

<sup>88</sup> ‘M’1077: ‘[God] is ... the sum of all being, and all other positive existence is but a communication from Him, hence it will follow that a proper regard to Himself is the sum of His regard’ (PJE, 184).

<sup>89</sup> ‘Essay on the Trinity’, *Treatise*, 99-131; ‘M’679, *Works*18, 237-39.

<sup>90</sup> Richard Weber, ‘The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards’, 305.

<sup>91</sup> ‘Essay on the Trinity’, *Treatise*, 106. See Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 78ff.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Substance’ is discussed in §3.c.i. below. JE uses ‘natural self-love’ to refer to the fundamental relation of the self to its own being in a neutral sense (meaning that it is essential or ‘natural’ to human being). Sometimes, however, he incautiously uses it in a negative sense to refer to the source of ‘every kind of wickedness’. This tends to make it synonymously with his more descriptive referents ‘inordinate self-love’ and ‘common self-love’. JE’s negative usage typically emphasizes self-love’s moral connection, which without distinction has the effect of de-emphasizing its ontological significance.



associated with fallen moral agents.<sup>94</sup> Distinct from this moral understanding of ‘self-love’ is, of course, the ontological (from which the moral is derived). When Edwards speaks of God’s self-love he invariably means the latter, though he never excludes its moral dimension. This self-love is consistent with ‘the deity subsisting in the prime’. He describes it as perfectly ‘excellent’, Trinitarian in nature, and inextricably woven together with the divine reality.<sup>95</sup>

Likewise for human beings: the first relational dimension or characteristic of being for human beings is the most fundamental. In Edwards’ ontology dispositional self-regard is the ‘being’ of ‘being-in-relation.’ Which is to say, in the logical order of a being’s relations, *self-relation* is logically prior. This does not mean that other-relation and God-relation are any less determinative of ‘human being’. It simply means that the disposition of self-relatedness is basic and primary, a *sine qua non* of human being.<sup>96</sup> Thus, self-love is part of the very essence of ‘human being’.<sup>97</sup> ‘Being’s consent to its own being’ is synonymous with being disposed to be, or being loving existence, or (which is the same thing) the self-love of a human being.

For Edwards, then, created human being is an ideal self, which—in *the first instance*—exercises itself as a mental disposition toward ‘being’, thereby instantiating ‘excellence’. God not only fashions such an instance of excellence through a dispositional prescription, but does so after His own image, for ‘Being, and disposition or Inclination ben’t Different in God [as] in our selves.’<sup>98</sup> ‘Excellence’, in terms of intelligent existence, is in fact the truest sense in which man exists as the image of God. In turn, the *imago Dei* stands as the most certain form of the *analogia entis*. Thus, the inherent ‘value’ or ‘worth’ of human being that concerns McClymond is determined by an *ontology of kinds*. Kind of existence is divinely determined by an entity’s *basic* mental structure. Human beings are a kind of mental existence like or analogous to God:

DEITY. Many have wrong conceptions of the difference between the nature of the Deity and created spirits. The difference is no contrariety, but what naturally results from His greatness and nothing else ... So that if we suppose the faculties of a created spirit to be enlarged infinitely, there would be the Deity to all intents and purposes, the same simplicity, immutability, etc.<sup>99</sup>

Edwards’ ‘ontology of kinds’ thesis explains two things: First, it tells us that mental existence determines the kind of entity on the ‘scale of being’. Mental existence carries at least a *basic* ‘degree of excellence’, which is determinative not only of kind, but also an entity’s basic ‘realness’ or *analogia entis*. Second, it gives us insight concerning Edwards’

<sup>94</sup> *Charity*, Works8, 255, 257-59; ‘The Mind’ 1, Works6, 337; ‘M’117, Works13, 283.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid; Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 186-88.

<sup>96</sup> Job 11:12 (c.1731/2), 14.

<sup>97</sup> ‘The Mind’ 1: ‘[T]his that they [i.e. moral sentimentalist philosophers] call self-love is no affection, but only the entity of the thing, or his being what he is’ (Works6, 337).

<sup>98</sup> Deut. 32:4 (1727). Cf. Aldridge, *Jonathan Edwards*, 138-39.

<sup>99</sup> ‘M’135, Works13, 295. It goes without arguing that, JE’s analogy of being implies no matter how excellent a created being may be or become, its knowing and loving itself is never an essential knowing and loving in the same way that the Son is *suigeneris* and the Holy Spirit eternally spirates.



proportionate regard thesis. When the basic ‘degree of excellence’ is arithmetically combined with the basic ‘degree of existence’ or realness, then an essential ‘value’ results. Appraising the value of kinds then becomes elementary. To use Edwards’ own example: ‘*An archangel* must be supposed to have more [mental] existence ... than a *worm* or a *flea*’;<sup>100</sup> likewise, a flea more than a stone. Certainly the employment of mathematical computations within the realm of eighteenth-century moral philosophy was nothing new.<sup>101</sup> Yet, Edwards’ use of a calculus of value to ascertain an *ontological* denomination of beings was something novel.

We may now fully address McClymond’s concern about the application of proportionate regard to all three categories of human being. How is it possible that God could regard man, even sinful, reprobate man? Answer: by regarding the basic degree of excellence every human being inherently possesses in the relation *AdA*.

### 3.c. *A Trinitarian Model of the Mind*

The third and last influence of his theocentrism that I will mention is really a further elucidation of the second influence discussed above. It concerns a parallel regard Edwards establishes between the *activity* of God’s primordial disposition of loving and knowing Himself and the first relation of created intelligence to itself.

Edwards explains that the content of God’s essential idea of Himself consists of actively knowing and loving His excellence.<sup>102</sup> When Edwards develops this idea, indicating that the Father’s knowing and loving is an *essential* knowing and loving, he has his ontological Trinity. In due course, he draws a parallel with man: God’s internal relations serve as the archetypal pattern of the inner constitution of man. In a typical passage he says,

There is ... an image of the Trinity in the soul of man. There is the mind and its understanding or idea, and the will or affection, or love: answering to God, the idea of God, and the love of God.<sup>103</sup>

However, it is not enough simply to say that Edwards applies the *model* of the Trinity to the structure of the self as a willing and understanding agent (this much is evident in the psychological constitution of man), but that created spirit *itself* possesses the same kind of *self-union* that God does: man’s essence consists of actively knowing and loving existence.

In Edwards, the understanding and the will are neither separate faculties nor conjoined. Rather, they are the activities or products of the mind or spirit, which is expressed in acts of

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<sup>100</sup> *TV, Works8*, 546 n. 6.

<sup>101</sup> Isaac Newton, Francis Hutcheson, George Turnbull, John Taylor and others, used a moral calculus in their determinations of ‘value’, ‘worth’, and ‘propriety’ (cf. Holbrook, ‘EI’, *Works3*, 37-38 n.4). Later, Jeremy Bentham, J.S. Mill, and others, forged a movement where utilitarian ethics were largely determined by mathematical computation and scientific methods. But JE aims for a determination of the ontological value of being, not a moral calculus per se.

<sup>102</sup> ‘Essay on the Trinity’, *Treatise*, 106.

<sup>103</sup> *M*362, *Works13*, 435. When JE speaks about the psychological constitution of man or anything referring to it, as a rule he uses the terms ‘will’, ‘affections’, ‘inclinations’, and ‘love’, interchangeably.



lawlike dispositions. Consequently, the existence, as well as the direction and manner in which these two ‘faculties’ function, is determined in the first place by the underlying disposition or ‘principle of nature’.<sup>104</sup> This dispositional activity gives a human being ‘self-union,’ and indeed *is* its ‘self-union’<sup>105</sup>

### 3.c.i. *Substance, Essence and Personal Identity*

**Substance, Essence.** So far we have a self and an essential disposition that, from its inception and in accord with its telic prescription, engages in the knowing and loving of being. We also know that the exercise of this self-loving disposition is the property of an ideal substance, which itself is an instance of excellence and, therefore, an instance of divine beauty. Furthermore, we know a spirit’s substance may possess other properties of dispositions that *directly* relate it to other beings and God. But according to Prof. Lee, all there is to intelligent perceiving beings is dispositions; there is no ‘*substance*’ in which dispositions inhere. While this may be true in Edwards’ account of bodies, yet in the case of self-conscious existences it is not. The same reasons delineated in Chapter II, §1.c regarding God’s substantial essence are applicable here. First, Edwards retains the language and meaning of ‘substance’ for human beings.<sup>106</sup> Second, he speaks of the defining dispositions of a human being as having a *locus*: they are, for example, *in* or *of* the ‘substance of the soul’.<sup>107</sup> Third, the soul cannot be (exclusively) a disposition given the centrality for Edwards of *self*-love and *self*-relation. Which is to say (over-against Lee), Edwards holds to the conventional position that a substance is what is capable of having properties (in this case dispositions), but is not itself a property of anything else. Consequently, Edwards gives an account of the ‘self’ in non-dispositional terms. Lastly, because he models man’s being step for step after God’s being, we know that the substance of a human being, of a ‘self’, is going to be (all things considered equal) the same – an idea. (Here Edwards goes where Bishop Berkeley dares not. Berkeley stops with the very soul or mind of man as, not an idea, but some curious ‘notion’.) Thus, the essential dispositions of a human have their *locus* in an idea designated a ‘self’. The question is, what constitutes the idea of a self?

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<sup>104</sup> *Works2*, 96-98, 206.

<sup>105</sup> *TV*, *Works8*, 589. JE in fact uses ‘self-love’ and ‘self-union’ interchangeably (589). Ramsey makes a similar observation, but stops short of the meaning I intend here. In his ‘EI’, Ramsey rightly argues that JE uses a recurring theme about the Trinity (viz. since any idea perfectly like a thing, *is* that thing and ‘wants nothing that is in the thing’) to make the case in *TV* that man’s conscience consists in ‘a disposition ... to be uneasy in a consciousness of being inconsistent with himself and, as it were, against himself in his own actions.’ From this Ramsey concludes, ‘ease of conscience is consistency’ with self-identity. Thus far Ramsey and I agree, but he proceeds no further; that is, he sees no ontological significance in ‘self-love,’ even though he says that the reflex action of conscience is at least one element in what JE ‘means by intelligent willing creatures being in the “natural image” of God,’ and that for JE, ‘conscience is, itself, a relation’ (*Works8*, 42, 43). Instead, self-love/self-union is subsumed under a discussion on conscience – a dynamic of the psychological trinitarian image in man.

<sup>106</sup> See *Works2*, 188; *Works3*, 399, 400, 401, 402; Deut. 32:4 (1727).

<sup>107</sup> *Works2*, 188. In the same place, JE refers to the soul as ‘an active substance’. Cf. *Works3*, 399-402.



A ‘self’, for Edwards, must be excellent; that is, it must have proportion, because only excellence is being, and only ‘real being’ may be considered (substantial) mental existence.<sup>108</sup> So, taking into account what he says about God comprehending all existence, we may infer that ‘the substance of the soul’ or what constitutes the idea of a self is, quite simply, divinely communicated existence, but such that—as a law—perceives itself, i.e. that has self-awareness/self-consciousness.<sup>109</sup> The cart, however, has not been put before the horse simply because a self itself is an idea expressed through a disposition that perceives ideas, even the very idea of itself. For the essential and most basic disposition of a self is also a divinely communicated (‘created’) idea. In fact, it is a property of the ideal substance called ‘self’. A ‘self’ is, then, a particular (substantial) idea of existence or instance of excellence communicated by God that, through the essential dispositional properties of that idea, reflects upon itself in a lawlike manner. Just how ‘the substance of the soul’ is an idea of itself may be explained through Edwards’ work on personal identity in *Original Sin*.

**Personal Identity.** Affixed to the end of his 1758 treatise *Original Sin* are a series of ‘Answers to Arguments’, one of which aims to further justify the doctrine of original sin by rendering personal identity *in* a time and *through* time totally dependent upon God’s determination. The metaphysical thinking behind this attempt is ingenious but radical. Its ingenuity lies in its simplicity: God simply regards or constitutes all humanity in Adam and his fall, as He does all the elect in Christ’s death and resurrection. To God, Adam and his posterity are ontologically one; it is that simple. So too, personal identity *in* a time (i.e. what constitutes personal identity for a ‘self’ in a particular moment strictly considered: we may consider this the ‘actual self’ in its constitutional objectivity) is simply a matter of God’s determination. That is, God determines and communicates the particulars that attribute individuality and personal identity.<sup>110</sup> However, simplicity gives way to complexity when we scrutinize how God perpetuates *through* time the link between personal identity and a created being’s ideal substance.

Edwards’ account of personal identity through time, like modern accounts of the same, commences with Locke’s thoughts on the topic. Locke, who holds that the identity of a person consists neither in the identity of an immaterial substance (*à la* Cartesian dualism) nor in the identity of a material substance or ‘physical body’, states that personal or self-identity consists in ‘same consciousness.’<sup>111</sup> His view appears to assert that the persistence of a person through time consists in the fact that certain actions, thoughts, experiences, etc., occurring at different

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<sup>108</sup> ‘M’41, *Works*13, 223.

<sup>109</sup> ‘The Mind’ 16, *Works*6, 345.

<sup>110</sup> ‘Notes on Knowledge and Existence’, *Works*6, 398.

<sup>111</sup> Locke, *Essay*, bk. II, c. 23, 27, nos. 5, 9. See, Helm, ‘Locke’s Theory of Personal Identity’, 173-85. This is not to ignore the contributions of Descartes to whom Locke refers in his own discussion on personal identity (see ‘Meditation VI’ in *Meditations*).



times, are somehow united in memory. This theory is familiar to philosophical discussion as the memory criterion of personal identity.

David Hume, however, radically dissents from Locke's position by denying that we have any idea of a 'self', either in a time or through time. He intends by this seemingly paradoxical repudiation of an idea of the self to push the question, What is meant by the 'self'? From what impression could this idea be derived? Which beckons a further question, Is there any continuous and identical reality that forms our ideas of the self? Upon reflection, Hume retorts that no one impression can be invariably associated with the idea of self. Thus Hume denies the existence of a self-identity in a time, let alone a continuous self-identity, and regards the rest of mankind as 'nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions.'<sup>112</sup>

His thorough denial of the existence of any form of substance leads Hume to deny the existence of a continuous self that in some way retains its identity through time. Locke retained the idea of substance, though he spoke of it as 'something we know not what.'<sup>113</sup> And even though Berkeley denies the existence of substance underlying qualities, yet the Bishop retains the idea of *spiritual* substances.<sup>114</sup> Hume denies that substance in any form exists or has any coherent meaning. If what is meant by the *self* is some form of substance, Hume argues that no such substance can be derived from our impressions of sensation. He made clear that the question of personal identity through time was a three-step process: first one had to argue for a 'self' and then establish personal identity in a time, then through a time.

Edwards first enters the discussion assuming a 'self' and sympathizing with a Lockean notion of personal identity in a time. But before long he breaks with Locke and complains, 'Identity of person is what seems never to have been explained. It is a mistake that it consists

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<sup>112</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 200-01; 252.

<sup>113</sup> Locke's understanding of 'substance' in connection with self-identity seems to be consistent with his usage of 'substratum' or 'substrata' elsewhere. That is, they probably mean the same thing. The important thing for Locke, however, is that whatever this substratum or substance may be, it upholds the continuity of mental organization, even through considerable changes in consciousness.

<sup>114</sup> Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge* in *The Works of George Berkeley*, 2:55. Berkeley, when explicating how it is that we know material entities exist, indeed, that there is such a thing as existence, grounds our knowledge of things upon the first condition of their existence, namely, our perception, and then our knowledge of existence upon perception, indicates a reality beyond them to realities of another order. From this stream of thought he develops his doctrine of existence in reference to mind. The question Berkeley then asks is, 'In what way do we know (experience) minds (ourselves) as existing?' Ans. By our occupation with ideas or objects, as perceiving them or contemplating about them, or as willing or acting in reference to them. In both respects the existence of mind is directly contrasted in character with that of ideas. Mind is percipient, ideas are perceived. Mind is active, ideas or objects are passive. To mentally exist, then, means to be active – perceiving or willing. There are several consequences to Berkeley's system: the foremost issue related to our present discussion is that, in Berkeley, we have no *idea* of mind (mind is something other than idea and therefore unperceived as an idea). We of course have knowledge *about* mind, according to Berkeley, but we must use some other term than *idea* to designate and explicate it. Berkeley uses 'notion' but this does not help. For JE. however, God has ideas that perceive, that is, the activity of perception itself is, as it were, an idea that God communicates as created perceiving being.



in sameness or identity of consciousness.’<sup>115</sup> Later we find he sides not with Hume, as Lee might suspect, but with Berkeley’s subjective idealism<sup>116</sup> and thereby joins a tradition of reaction against Locke, through the denial of substance underlying qualities and in the retention of the idea of spiritual substances. But without the aid of Berkeley’s works,<sup>117</sup> his conception of spiritual or mental substances differs from the Bishop’s. Where Berkeley is content to think of mental substance as ‘mind’, Edwards clearly identifies mind with ‘idea’.<sup>118</sup>

From this position, Edwards explains (over-against Locke’s notion that the continuity of the ideas, or the ideas’ continuity, constitutes self-identity) that the divine communication of a person’s *present* consciousness toward existence comprises personal identity *in* a time. This stands consistent with the notion considered earlier, that it is the idea (of existence) which constitutes the mental substance of human being.<sup>119</sup>

Edwards’ departure from Locke and, indeed, from some of his Calvinist predecessors stems from what lay beneath their notions of self-conscious intelligence, namely, (i) ‘certain real essences’ that were not identified with *ideas* and, (ii) along with the idea of essence, that of enduring through time as *that* identical essence.<sup>120</sup> In Edwards’ view, substances that were not identified with ideas left the door open for a dualist account of reality. If this did not lend itself to skepticism or Hobbes’ materialism, then it tended to separate a conception of a *single* ideal reality with multiple perceivable dimensions (e.g. spiritual-moral/spatial-empirical), such as Edwards proposed. Furthermore, non-ideal essences and Lockean substratum were untenable because there was no way to discover a substratum or essence. In Edwards’ mind, since ‘all existence is perception, we have no evidence of immaterial substance’.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> ‘The Mind’ 11 and 72, *Works6*, 342-43, 385-86. See Locke, *Essay* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1694), bk. II, c. 27, 9f. Anderson offers an insightful discussion as to why and how JE rebuffed Locke’s account of personal identity in ‘The Mind’ 11 and more extensively in *OS* (Part IV, c. 3). See ‘EI’, *Works6*, 116-17.

<sup>116</sup> To express the fact that the only kind of existence which we can intelligibly attribute to material things is that kind of existence which they have for perception, Berkeley designates them ideas, i.e. objects of the mind. But this is not subjective idealism per se, because qualities of objects are in the mind only as they are perceived by it, not by way of mode or attributes, but only by way of idea. We do well to remember that Berkeley was not seeking to change things into ideas but ideas into things (perceptions of ideas are the conditions of the existence of things) – real engageable things.

<sup>117</sup> Though Berkeley’s *Theory of Vision* (1709), *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), and *Alciphron* (1734) are listed on the ‘Catalogue’, JE did not cross them off (as was his practice) to indicate that they had been read (Johnson, ‘Jonathan Edwards’ Background Reading’, 212). Whether JE read Berkeley or not, he would have been familiar with his ideas via secondary sources (Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 14-16).

<sup>118</sup> ‘The Mind’ 16, *Works6*, 345.

<sup>119</sup> Here JE may be seen to stand somewhat akin to Malebranche, save for the pantheistic implications of the latter’s ‘vision of God’. Malebranche held that our soul is known only by consciousness, that is, by our sensations. And if, as Malebranche maintains, the essence of mind consists only in thought, as the essence of matter consists only in extension, there is a suggestion of pantheism, due to the fact that he identifies all perceived ideas as those which are in God. JE, we recall, does not own a dualistic scheme – matter is not some other substance that (by implication) can be identified with God. Rather, matter is an idea, the effect of which is the manifestation of God’s power. There is no competing substance with God.

<sup>120</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I.15.2; Locke, *Essay*, bk. II, c. 23.

<sup>121</sup> ‘The Mind’ 67, *Works6*, 384.



But, he asserts, we *do* perceive ideas, ideas that God communicates to a ‘passive’ mind. In fact (and as we have seen above), God communicates an idea of a particular existence, the which, when communicated by God, reflects upon itself and constitutes ‘the substance of the soul’.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, it serves as a nexus or, synonymously, link, tie, or connection between the essential dispositions that constitute man’s consciousness.<sup>123</sup> So much for identity in a time, what about *through* time?

In Edwards, that which constitutes a continuous self, or the identity of a spirit through a time, is ‘a composition and series of perceptions, or an universe of coexisting and successive perceptions connected by such wonderful methods and laws’ constituted by God.<sup>124</sup> The continuous identity of a spirit, then, is not some kind of non-ideal spiritual substance in which particular human qualities inhere, or whose moral temper governs human behavior. Rather, as Allen Guelzo puts it, ‘Just as the essence which “upholds the properties of bodies” is really “he by whom all things consist,” so all our ideas proceed in a relationship issuing not from ourselves but from God. The *nature* which the mind has, and which governs its temper and its liking or not liking of motives, resolves ultimately into the act of God himself.’<sup>125</sup> Edwards does not deny that sameness of consciousness and memory are ‘one thing essential’ to self-identity (i.e. that they are necessary to it but are not it). But when asked, what constitutes self-identity and its continuance through time, he replies: God’s conception or idea of a being’s self-identity, and the activity of God in the communication of that divine ideal series:

“’Tis evident, that the communication or continuance of the same consciousness and memory to any subject, through successive parts of duration, depend wholly on a divine establishment.”<sup>126</sup>

Here Edwards makes a sophisticated twist and calls for a radical change in perspective. He regards as essentially wrong the ordinary thought and language that people commonly employ about the objectivity of the world as well as their enduring personal identity and says—*against* a common sense position—that it is fundamentally wrong; it conflicts with contingent reality. Instead, he favors an ‘error theory’<sup>127</sup> of personal identity through time and the existence of the world, and describes it in a way ordinary people simply do not talk. He wants to say that God determines the course and order of the successive ideas and states of consciousness that constitute the identity of a spirit through time; or, in other words, the establishing of a mental existence is nothing but a mental exercise of knowledge and perception *on the part of God*. Reality, as we know and experience it, is really re-created each moment – and us with it. Time itself has no intrinsic continuity, but is an idea communicated

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<sup>122</sup> *Works*3, 399-400.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 126; ‘M’241, *Works*13, 358.

<sup>124</sup> ‘Notes on Knowledge and Existence’, *Works*6, 398.

<sup>125</sup> Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will*, 74-75. Cf. ‘The Mind’ 61, *Works*6, 380.

<sup>126</sup> *Works*3, 398.

<sup>127</sup> J.L. Mackie (*Ethics*) coined the phrase ‘error theory’ in his discussion of the status of ethics. He adopts a distinctive version of subjectivism, i.e. an ‘error theory’ of the *apparent* objectivity of values.



to us like frames in a movie reel.<sup>128</sup> The doctrine of continuous creation showed *how* God could be the efficient cause *through* time, viz. by re-creating, as it were, the individual each and every moment. Moreover, Edwards wants to say that God's determination is nothing but an 'arbitrary operation.'<sup>129</sup> His purpose for doing this is fourfold: it dispossesses the deists of a distant God; it wrestles reality out of the hands of materialists and radical humanists and puts it back into God's control; it provides an opportunity to revisit the discussion on human nature and ethics; and it argues for a theocentric morality based on the revelation of God and 'The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin'.<sup>130</sup>

There is then no method or law prior to God's fashioning mental existences. It is a pure mental/spiritual/moral exercise, whereby 'all union and all created identity is arbitrary', that is, determined by God's arbitration.<sup>131</sup> God determines, however, that He is the most 'fitting' model and therefore 'suitably' fashions man after His own mental and arbitrary likeness:

'Tis the glory of God that He is an arbitrary being—that originally He, in all things, acts as being limited and directed in nothing but His own wisdom, tied to no other rules and laws but the directions of His own infinite understanding. So in those that are the highest order of God's creatures, viz. intelligent creatures, that are distinguished from other creatures in their being made in God's image, 'tis one thing wherein consists their highest natural dignity, that they have an image of this. They have a secondary and dependent arbitrariness.... These things being observed, I would take notice that the higher we ascend in the scale of created existence and the nearer we come to the Creator, the more and more arbitrary we should find the divine operations in the creature, or those communications and influences in which He maintains and intercourse with the creature. And it appears beautiful and every way fit [and] suitable that it should be so.<sup>132</sup>

But because man's arbitrariness is 'dependent' and derivative, we may go on to speak of the effects of God's fashioning, for example, the mind's perception of the idea of phenomena, or even its own being, as retaining the character of a Newtonian system in that God establishes the 'coexisting and successive' perception of those ideas in invariable laws, or as Edwards chose to put it, in 'wonderful methods and laws.' Ultimately, God's arrangement grounds causal connections in 'the infinitely exact and precise and perfectly stable idea in God's mind together with his stable will,'<sup>133</sup> which in turn gives the perception of 'regularity' or 'succession' to natural phenomena and even ideas.

<sup>128</sup> In 'M' 1263, JE explains that time emerges from God's 'arbitrary operation', though time itself is a 'mixing of arbitrary with natural operations' (PJE, 191). Cf. Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 100-01.

<sup>129</sup> Holbrook confirms this by stating: 'Edwards concluded that identity of consciousness depends on an "arbitrary divine constitution" and not on some independent function of personality. God as efficient agent directly causes personal identity, and there is no possible recourse to some order in nature which operates by its own impetus' ('EI', *Works3*, 56; cf. 399).

<sup>130</sup> It should be noted that JE originally contemplated producing a single major treatise which would have included *OS* and *Two Dissertations*, and that these treatises would have undoubtedly held a central place in his projected *magnum opus*. See MS 'Book of Controversies' (Beinecke Library), 97, 101-02 evidenced by Holbrook in 'EI', *Works3*, 22-23. Cf. *Worcester-Works*, 5:440-47.

<sup>131</sup> 'Notes on Knowledge and Existence,' *Works6*, 398.

<sup>132</sup> 'M' 1263, PJE, 186.

<sup>133</sup> 'The Mind' 13, *Works6*, 344.



But more must be said with regard to ‘the *nature* which the mind has’, mentioned by Prof. Guelzo. Although God’s original motion to create intelligent perceiving consciousness and ideas may be considered ‘purely arbitrary’, yet not only is the subsequent manner in which God communicates the ideas ‘connected by such wonderful methods and laws,’ but even *what* exist as ‘*a composition*’ or ‘*an universe* of coexisting and successive perceptions’ are certain fixed and established laws.<sup>134</sup> In fact, they exist as the divine idea of lawlike receptions or perceptions of divine communications: hence the place of dispositions in Edwards’ system.

My point may be better explained through an examination of Edwards’ choice of words in his explication of personal identity through time: ‘[self-identity consists in] a composition and series of perceptions, or an universe of coexisting and successive perceptions connected by such wonderful methods and laws.’ Present here is an equating or further elucidation of ‘a composition’ with ‘an universe’. He aims to explain that there is an ontological something, ‘a composition’ or ‘an universe,’ which exists and is composed of a *series* or succession of coexisting perceptions. For Edwards, the notion of ‘a composition’ or ‘an universe’ implies the idea of an established order or law. Which is to say, ‘an universe of coexisting and successive perceptions’ is the same thing as a law or disposition of perceiving. This claim is further supported by its consisting in a ‘series of perceptions,’ in that ‘series’ and ‘succession’ also imply some order or regularity. Such order or regularity is governed by or established as a law, which in turn gives it an abiding nature in the divine mind.

The key word in his definition, however, is ‘coexisting’. By ‘coexisting’ perceptions he means that ‘an universe’ or ‘a composition’ exists *with* and *in* the perception of ideas. And since the ideas that God communicates about intelligent perceiving being are of a particular sort (i.e. a lawlike series of perceiving the idea of existence), its own existence is established as an idea in God’s mind in a lawlike way, that is, after a particular composition or series.

But the importance of ‘coexisting’ is not yet exhausted. To exist with or in the perception of the idea of existence is to be related or somehow internally associated with that perception. That is, since all of *IPB*’s perceived ideas are from God, which includes *IPB*’s idea of itself or the idea of *that IPB*, then contained within those ‘fixed and regular’ communications from God must also be the idea of *that* idea received or perceived. Which, when pursued further, is understood as the idea of being intellectually and inclinationally consenting to its own existence – i.e. perceiving the idea of itself or the idea of existence. The implication of which means, for Edwards, self-consciousness is a *sine qua non* feature of created intelligent being, in the same way that God’s self-consciousness is a necessary feature of His own existence.

Edwards, then, thought to understand self-identity in the idea of self-consciousness as an immediate and continuous creation of God, in which perceived ideas are connected to each other not because of something in them or in their surroundings but by God’s initial arbitrary

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.



constitution, which joins them in a series according to ‘fixed’ laws that God Himself establishes. The problem of self-consciousness with memory is treated accordingly: memory involves the repetition of an idea together with an act of judgment that it was perceived (or, better, communicated by God) before; ‘and that judgment not properly from proof, but from natural necessity arising from a law of nature which God hath fixed.’<sup>135</sup> God’s retention and communication of all such ideas are after His ‘natural operation’. Contrary to Locke’s *tabula rasa* thesis, personal identity in a time and through time is located in innate dispositions determined by God, according to Edwards.<sup>136</sup>

Edwards locates the difference between ‘real’ minds and the intelligence he attributes to ‘brutes and beasts’ in the reflexivity of self-consciousness.<sup>137</sup> But the reflexivity is not merely contemplative: thought is distinguished from mere perception in that men have ‘voluntary actions about their own thoughts.’ Thus, when he comes to define consciousness as such, he writes: ‘the mind’s perceiving what is in itself—its ideas, actions, passions, and everything that is there perceivable. It is a sort of feeling within itself.’<sup>138</sup>

Reflexivity of consciousness can also be explained as the ‘remanation’ of the spiritual image of God in man. *IPB*’s remanation of the ideas that God ‘emanates’ or communicates, specifically the idea of self-relatedness (and, secondarily, other-relatedness), is what Edwards would acknowledge to be *consciousness*—the intellectual and inclinational internalization of the idea of the relationship to the self, or self-existence, or relatedness, etc. In man’s intellectual and inclinational relation to God’s ideas (be what they may) we have

both an *emanation* and *remanation*. The refulgence shines upon and into the creature, and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God, are something of God, and are refunded back again to their original.<sup>139</sup>

The divine idea of an *IPB*’s reflexivity of consciousness is, thus, an act of remanation, or the mental imaging of divine ideas. As Edwards says in ‘M’260, ‘There is no other properly spiritual image but [an] idea.’<sup>140</sup> Which is to say, the lawlike active tendency of the

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<sup>135</sup> ‘The Mind’ 69, *Works6*, 384.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, c. 5.

<sup>137</sup> This again is remarkably similar to Berkeley. While Berkeley said that we have no idea of self, but only some ‘notion’ of the self, yet he approximates JE in that he argues that a person gains some immediately knowledge of the existence and nature of him/herself in a *reflex act*; that is, when he/she is perceiving something he/she is also conscious that something is engaging in this perception, and this is sufficient for knowledge of that perceiving entity. JE makes the perception more internal – the perception or divinely communicated idea of consciousness is the perception of Being in general or being-as-manifest. That is, God communicates an idea, the substance of which is reflexive perception of being, designated consciousness.

<sup>138</sup> ‘The Mind’ 59 and 16, *Works6*, 374, 345. Here, JE’s constructivist worldview (in which language or, more precisely, Trinitarian communication, ‘constructs’ the world) is evident: ‘self’ for JE assumes self. Cf. Daniel, ‘Postmodern Concepts of God and Edwards’s Trinitarian Ontology’ in *Edwards in Our Time*, 45-64; and Daniel, *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards*, 114-28.

<sup>139</sup> *EofC*, *Works8*, 531.

<sup>140</sup> *Works13*, 368.



dispositions constituting 'human being' is, at the very least, the 'continual' reception and remanation of the idea of existence.

Clearly Edwards was on the way to creating a doctrine that stated: such consciousnesses are ultimately a set of dispositions by virtue of their (i) self-relatedness, (ii) relative metaphysical independence as *self-consciousnesses*,<sup>141</sup> and (iii) present disposition toward ideas (and not the ideas' continuity) which constitutes one's identity. All of this, of course, is founded upon his metaphysics of time and used in *Original Sin* to secure such traditional dogmas as the imputation of Adam's sin, inherent corruption, providence, and free grace.<sup>142</sup>

God's determination of *which* particular series of ideas He intends to communicate in conjunction with the idea of 'an universe' determines, for Edwards, perceptual existence and, consequently, personal identity.<sup>143</sup>

In Edwards' thinking, self-awareness or self-consciousness gives spirits a degree of substantiality (realness). For him, matter and animals are not self-reflective mental existences and therefore not primary instances of proportion. The one is insensate, the other annihilated at death. But minds of a superior ontological kind are ideas that are composed of self-loving/self-conscious dispositions. This makes them more 'arbitrary', i.e. less ordered by laws and therefore more mental, spiritual, and moral, or, in a word, 'real', after God's idea of Himself.<sup>144</sup> As Edwards wrote in *End of Creation*:

... there is something in that disposition in God to communicate goodness which shows him to be *independent* and *self-moved* in it, in a manner that is peculiar, and above what is in the

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<sup>141</sup> By 'independence' I do not mean an 'autonomous self-perpetuation', but that man, unlike any other spatio-temporal existence, does not require another to actuate (substantiate) the idea of his being. That is, while JE's idealism requires an *IPM* for the spatio-temporal realization of all non-*IPMs*, yet the reflexivity of consciousness attains the end of self-realization for any given *IPM*. Also *IPBs*, as continuing entities, have their substantiality only in God's mind, they exist only in that God forms and communicates a coherent lawlike 'series' of ideas about them. So while they are indeed images of God (as consciousnesses), yet they are dependent and 'always behind His clarity. He communicates to them, and so they have being' (Jenson, *America's Theologian*, 33). This idea does not cloud God's existence, however, for God, according to JE, is an independent mind of independent innertrinitarian relations. For more on 'autonomous self-perpetuation' and its relation to consciousness and self-maintenance, see Shoemaker, 'Functional Consciousness' in *Experimental and Theoretical Studies in Consciousness*.

<sup>142</sup> Holbrook rounds out the discussion by remarking: 'After correcting [John] Taylor on the point that Scripture explicitly and implicitly includes Adam's posterity in God's judgment on Adam (252-57) and shows Adam to be "the public head and representative of his posterity" (247, 383), Edwards demonstrates how the constituted relations between Adam and the human race operates and what the moral justifications of that arrangement is. The factual question must be dealt with, and the hard fact is that God deals with mankind as a unity ... Humanity is organically one by virtue of "an established method and order of events, settled and limited by divine wisdom," and it existed in Adam as the branches and fruit of a tree are in the tree (cf. pp. 386, 389) ... The trouble, as Edwards saw it, was that Taylor simply did not understand what imputation meant because he had not grasped the meaning of the concept of personal identity.... A mature person, Edwards pointed out, is in certain respects quite different from what he was as an infant. Many changes of "substances" have taken place between birth and maturity, yet in each person, established by God, and it is this same divinely ordained principle by which Adam and his posterity are counted as one' ('EI', *Works*3, 54-55).

<sup>143</sup> See 'M'267, *Works*13, 373.

<sup>144</sup> See 'M'1263.



beneficence of creatures. Creatures, even the most gracious of them, are not so independent and self-moved in their goodness but that in all the exercises of it, they are excited by some object that they find: something appearing good, or in some respect worthy of regard, presents itself, and moves their kindness. But God being all and alone is *absolutely self-moved*. The exercises of his communicative disposition are absolutely *from within Himself*, not finding any thing, or any object, and the very *being* of the object, proceeding from the overflowing of His fullness.<sup>145</sup>

Edwards' logic thus argues that those beings that have knowledge and consciousness are 'the only proper and real and substantial beings, inasmuch as the being of other things is only by these.'<sup>146</sup> 'From hence', Edwards concludes in 'Of Being', 'we may see the gross mistake of those who think that material things the most substantial beings, and spirits more like a shadow; whereas spirits only are properly substance.'<sup>147</sup>

Although he allots human beings a substance, yet he still can say (as he does in his 1757 'Notes on Knowledge and Existence') that God is 'the only substance' because only God has being 'all at once'. Other existences have only *momentary existences* as events in a temporal series. This is Edwards' 'error theory' of existence in time, which comes out in his treatise *Original Sin*. There he sets forth his doctrine of divine conservation or continuous-creation, stating that the world is momentarily quenched and replaced by a similar world of new ontological realities. However, Leon Chai's criticism that the immediacy of God's continuous-creation excludes the employment of laws 'no matter how specific' clearly does not apply.<sup>148</sup> In Edwards' version of divine conservation, what God quenches and recreates each moment is something that possesses a prior ontological reality as the idea of an '*ad extra*' reality to God. Here, again, we have the answer to how lawlike dispositions possess an ontological reality apart from temporal manifestation: they are present within 'a series' in God's mind. Because the whole series of God's work and presence '*ad extra*' is complete and full in His mind, He considers them in His atemporal knowledge all at once—in *their series*—as an actuality. Each divinely communicated moment of the world is really part of a unified series to God. Likewise, each and every dispositional exercise is part of a network or matrix, not just in terms of structure (one entity or event standing in relation to another), but also in terms of sequence or chronology—past, present, and future. The matrix of existences, temporal progression, and emanation/remanation, constitute one permanent, interrelated and unbreakable series in God: hence the world's mode of abiding or prior reality.

Edwards' causality requires a cause to be equal to or greater than its corresponding effect. The idea of the world or any thought in the mind of perceiving beings does not possess causal power to sustain that idea, nor even the idea of themselves.<sup>149</sup> Thus Edwards goes about explaining how personal identity is established through time by God by elaborating the

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<sup>145</sup> *Works*8, 462. Italics JE's in *Worcester-Works*6, 59-60.

<sup>146</sup> 'Of Being', *Works*6, 206.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> Chai, *Limits of Enlightenment*, 144.

<sup>149</sup> 'M'267, *Works*13, 373.



proposition, as he does in *Original Sin*, ‘that God not only created all things, and gave them being at first, but continually preserves them, and upholds them in being.’<sup>150</sup> He then moves on in the same treatise to explain that antecedent existences cannot cause a new existence because ‘what is gone is not’ (*M*134). It must follow that ‘the existence of created substances, in each successive moment, must be the effect of the *immediate* agency, will, and power of God.’<sup>151</sup> God, therefore, must literally re-create that idea of the world for them, and even of themselves to themselves, each and every moment. As Holbrook then explains:

When God wills that in certain respects there be oneness or identity among successive acts, he communicates to them like ‘properties, relations, and circumstances,’ thereby leading men also to treat them as one. This arrangement Edwards boldly calls an ‘arbitrary constitution’ because it depends on nothing but the divine will guided by divine wisdom.<sup>152</sup>

Thus Edwards sets forth the view that personal identity or the continuity of any finite entity through time depends wholly on God’s operation, and in this connection he spoke of God’s sustaining activity in the world as a perfectly arbitrary action: ‘God’s *preserving* created things in being,’ or his preserving in a human being an individual consciousness identical with the infant that person once was, are ‘perfectly equivalent to a *continued creation*, or to his creating those things out of nothing at *each moment* of their existence.’<sup>153</sup>

This concept makes Edwards’ doctrine both unique and uniquely counterintuitive from the perspective of the human agent. He does not reiterate the traditional doctrine of divine conservation, which purports that: given that *x* exists now at *T*<sub>1</sub> and also at *T*<sub>2</sub>, can only be accounted for by God’s will. Rather, he says that *x* at *T*<sub>1</sub> is not numerically the same *x* at *T*<sub>2</sub>. Such a strong revisionist proposal claims that all other perceptions of reality are in error.

What then is re-created each and every moment is the idea of an external world, plus the idea that a remaining world is the one perceived. Anything less than a ‘creative’ power will not cause the ‘constant’ effect of a perceived reality.<sup>154</sup> Yet, from the perspective of God, it is not an entirely new ontological creation, similar to a quenched preceding world. Rather, it is the next idea of the world in God’s determined series. So, for example, an *IPB*’s perception (reception) of divine ideas of its own existence follows after a reproduction of a divine series, communicated to that *IPB* one frame at a time, with the appearance of *T*<sub>1</sub> → *T*<sub>2</sub>, etc. The body and soul in *T*<sub>2</sub> are *not* numerically identical with the original (prior) body and soul in *T*<sub>1</sub>.<sup>155</sup> It is not that they have been reproduced in *T*<sub>2</sub>, but that they are an entirely new mode of physicality and mental constitution of consciousness. Man’s identity, then, does not lie in his ‘constituent parts,’ which are, at different moments in time, numerically distinct effects, but

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<sup>150</sup> *Works*3, 400.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, ‘EI’, 56-57.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 402.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 400-01.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 403 n.5.



in the *arbitrary* constitution of the Creator; who by his wise sovereign establishment so unites these successive new effects, that he *treats them as one*, by communicating to them like properties, relations, and circumstances; and so leads us to regard and treat them as one.<sup>156</sup>

For all intents and purposes, then, the idea of the world and of the self in a preceding moment is ‘past, and what is gone is not’ (*M* 134); unless, of course, that moment is connected in a series with the present and future, which, according to Edwards, it certainly is, just like stills in a movie reel.<sup>157</sup> This is what gives us the impression that the world and ourselves are (other things considered equal) the same through time.

Temporal series are nothing more than expressions of God’s power, or pulses of divine power to the perceiver; to God it is all one and He is all one. Consequently, Edwards’ talk of substance and personal identity continuing through time is really only by license, derivatively, and the predication of language, because finite spirits and, consequently, the world (unlike God) are dependent upon the communication of that series for existence. Hence, Edwards’ hierarchy of beauty and being and stress upon the vertical dimension of created order and being. He stresses the ethereal because it fully envelops the temporal. Both dimensions, however, are really perceptions of a single reality, the substance of which is ideal. The *locus* of *that* idea is another idea – God’s idea of created minds modeled after Himself.

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Contrary to the Enlightenment announcement that man carries out his own destiny and is the forger of his own identity,<sup>158</sup> Edwards declares that man enters the world as the effect of God’s determination and continues in existence and identity only by God. In *Original Sin*, he is not simply defending an outmoded doctrine; rather, he calls for a complete abandonment in the way not only the self but also the world is conceived. So dependent is causation upon God, that not a single thing in the universe can continue one moment without *immediate* divine power to recreate it one frame of time after the other.

But Edwards leaves us with more questions than he answers in *Original Sin*. For instance, Rem B. Edwards questions how self-consciousness works with relation to his continuous-creation from the perspective of the human agent. If a human agent does not persist more than a moment, then how can that agent be morally responsible for his actions as *his own* actions? Philip Quinn also scrutinizes the causation issue in *Original Sin* and finds the point on the integrity of human actions defective without a contiguous temporal element. Edwards simply does not provide an account thorough enough to answer these questions.

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<sup>156</sup> *Works*3, 403.

<sup>157</sup> Consider JE’s remarks with respect to a thing’s connection with the future, that is, its ‘necessary future’ as part of a ‘series’ in the divine mind: ‘Knowledge of futurity, supposes futurity; and a *certain* [i.e. absolute] *knowledge* of futurity, supposes *certain futurity*, antecedent to that certain knowledge ... inasmuch as *in effect* it actually exists already; its future existence has already had actual influence and efficiency, and had *produced an effect*, viz. prescience: the effect exists already’ (*FW*, *Works*1, 265).

<sup>158</sup> Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, passim.



More recently, Paul Helm has pointed out that the problematic gap between Edwards' occasionalistic causality extends to the issue of personal identity in *Freedom of the Will*.<sup>159</sup> One may offer a speculation reconstruction based on Edwardsean principles to answer some of these questions (just as Quinn); but knowing Edwards' proclivity toward imbibing principles from other thinkers and creatively synthesizing them with his own inventive ideas, doubtful conclusions may be the only fruit of such an endeavor.

One can only suppose that Edwards, who was occupied with numerous projects and ecclesiastical (as well as personal) issues, simply did not have opportunity to complete his thoughts on these points, but intended to do so, perhaps in his projected *magnum opus*. Presumably someone as intellectually rigorous as Edwards would have pondered the additional burden divine conservation placed upon the incarnation before publishing his version of the doctrine in *Original Sin*. Whatever may be the case, he certainly was driven by the thought that God could not make the world and therefore man disorderly if He intended a telic movement for creation. For Edwards, nothing could be more orderly than laws in the mind of God. Unlike his freethinking Enlightenment counterparts and especially the Arminians, he sees more order as a determinist than the indeterminists.

Edwards' world simply is not the same as a deist's world, or Hobbes' world, or even Locke's world. His vision of the existence of the world is really a perception of God communicating to intelligent minds the movement of Himself—the matrix of existences—to His consummate end. In the mind of God this supreme end is one and eternally complete, yet one in which He communicates in series form to other minds one frame at a time. Such is Edwards' treatment of the doctrine of divine preservation, he simply subsumes it under continuous-creation: God's retention of the series that He communicates preserves of the world. Charles Hodge, A. H. Strong, and others, were, of course, to vigorously disagree with Edwards on this point,<sup>160</sup> and so indicate that his 'error theory' was too radical, too abstract, for those who followed in his theological tradition.

### **3.c.ii. Psychological Constitution**

Edwards deals with the psychological constitution of man in the same way as man's ontological constitution – modeling it after the Trinity. Not only does such a treatment remain consistent with Edwards' theocentrism, it also complements the applied dimensions of his dispositional ontology. Just as there is a trinity of sorts within the being of man, so too a psychological analysis of the human soul reveals an analogy of the Trinity:

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<sup>159</sup> Rem B. Edwards, *A Return to Moral and Religious Philosophy in Early America*, 68; Quinn, 'Divine Conservation, Continuous-Creation, and Human Action' in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. Freddoso, c. 3; Helm, *Faith and Understanding*, 174-75.

<sup>160</sup> Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:577, 2:217f; Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 416.



There is a resemblance to this threefold distinction in God, a threefold distinction in a created spirit; namely, the spirit itself, and its understanding, and its will or inclination or love. And this indeed is all the real distinction there is in created spirits.

Elsewhere he says:

There is yet more of an image of the Trinity in the soul of man: there is the mind, and its understanding or idea, and the will or affection or love—the heart, comprising inclination, affections, etc.—answering to God, the idea of God, and the love of God.

In Edwards' Trinitarian model, the Father is designated the position of 'mind', the Son 'understanding,' and the Spirit 'will or affection or love'. In a parallel way a human being is a 'mind' (in the first way of conceiving) that possesses 'understanding' and 'will'.<sup>161</sup>

What stands out in these passages and, indeed, Edwards' whole approach to the philosophy of mind is the way the dispositional-ontological concepts appear to have been modified into psychological concepts and the ontological vocabulary translated into psychological terminology. For instance, Edwards' ontology holds that the relation to self, or the self-love disposition, is the *sine qua non* of human being. The same concept can be explained in psychological terms by saying that consciousness (involving perception and knowledge of self) is necessary for the existence of any and all human beings.<sup>162</sup>

Similarities in concepts and terminology are no coincidence. The psychological approach to explaining the existence, state, and function of minds, not only was part of Edwards' theological tradition (one immediately thinks of Augustine), but the fashion of his day. Moreover, it was more accessible and familiar to his New England auditors than the onerous language of 'being'. Still, in order to plumb the depths of his ontological concepts, Edwards occasionally had no other alternative but to employ psychological categories and terms. For example, after concluding that the soul's essence 'consists in powers and habits' or 'dispositions', he explains that the relational structure of being is in or through the unified intellectual and inclinational 'faculties' of the mind.<sup>163</sup> The perceiving and affectional cognition of man is, for Edwards, *consciousness* or mental existence itself. Psychological terms and ideas are not only useful for Edwards to fully explain his ontological conceptions, but they offer a concreteness that his metaphysical abstractions do not.

Consciousness itself, however, emerges as the unifying principle to his thoughts concerning the integrity or unity of the soul. Both in his idealism and ontology, consciousness

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<sup>161</sup> 'M'259 and 362, *Works*13, 367, 435. When JE says that the mind, understanding, and will are the only 'real distinctions there is in created spirits', he does not intend that there are in fact three particulate and concrete things that make up the psychological constitution of man. The unity of the soul persists in this theory also (*Works*1, 163; *Works*2, 96-97). The oneness of God's ideal being serves as the prime ontic source of JE's unified integrity-of-the-soul thesis. This integrity of self or 'self-union' supplies him with another instance of the divine image in man. For inasmuch as God is one, so too man is one in the divine mental image.

<sup>162</sup> This point could be expanded further by directly referring to JE's idealism, which requires a created consciousness to perceive and know, for the existence of anything whatsoever.

<sup>163</sup> 'M'94, *Works*13, 256-63; *TI*, *Works*8, 589-90.



is synonymous with intelligent perceiving existence in the sense that, it is impossible that anything intelligent should exist and ‘nothing know it’, for ‘nothing has any existence anywhere else but in consciousness. No, certainly nowhere else, but either in created or uncreated consciousness.’<sup>164</sup> This includes the agent of consciousness itself. Which is to say, man’s essential being manifests itself in and through—to use the psychological designation—*consciousness*, an intellectual and inclinational engagement with its own existence (‘the consent of being to its own being’).

The ‘image’ of the Trinity in a man can be represented and further elucidated (other than ontologically) through an analysis of psychological self-knowledge. Consider ‘M’94:

Man is as if he were two, as some of the great wits of this age have observed. A sort of genius is with man that accompanies him and attends wherever he goes; so that a man has a conversation with himself, that is, he has a conversation with his own idea. So that if his idea be excellent, he will take great delight and happiness in conferring and communing with it; he takes complacency in himself, he applauds himself; and wicked men accuse themselves and fight with themselves, as if they were two. And man is truly happy then, and only then, when these two agree, and they delight in themselves, and in their own idea and image as God delights in his.<sup>165</sup>

Here several previously discussed facets of Edwards’ thought are collected together, particularly the aesthetic, telic, and ontic dimensions of human existence. None of these, however, are thought of entirely independent of the others, but together they explain the ‘mind’ of human being. Since Edwards presents mental existence as mind reflecting on itself, then there must be some instance of ‘proportion’ effected, as well as ‘consent’ and, therefore, self-fulfillment. In Edwards, the reflexive action of mind is aesthetic and teleological: an *IPB*’s ‘idea’ of its own being is ‘excellent’ or ‘agreeable’ and, therefore, an instance of aesthetic beauty (ontic proportion) in which telic fulfillment (‘happiness’) is achieved.

The image of the psychological Trinity in man, then, is his mind (equal to the Father) ‘conversing’ or intellectually (Son) and inclinationally (Spirit) perceiving the idea of its state of existence at each and every moment. The ‘first’ man is his mind; the ‘second’ is the reflex action of the mind in self-consciousness through the ‘faculties’ of understanding and will.<sup>166</sup>

When these thoughts are applied to the realm of virtue ethics, mental consciousness gains a moral dimension as a human being’s ‘natural conscience.’ For Edwards, ‘natural conscience’ is an inherent ‘disposition in man to be uneasy in a consciousness of being inconsistent with

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<sup>164</sup> ‘Of Being’, *Works*6, 204.

<sup>165</sup> *Works*13, 260.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. Fiering notes similarities between JE’s ontological and psychological theories and Aquinas, as well as ‘Protestant Scholasticism and Platonism’ (*Moral Thought*, 325-26). Carse adds Augustine (*Jonathan Edwards and the Visibility of God*, 95-113). Here, too, I maintain that JE used his dispositional analysis of the ontological Trinity to serve as the prime analogate for human beings. Although the language and concepts that he adopts are the standing psychological terms and ideas of his day, yet his understanding of Being-as-Triune so shaped and influenced his thinking about man, that man’s ontic and psychological constitutions conform to his conception of God, not vice versa.



himself and, as it were, against himself in his own actions.’<sup>167</sup> In the relational terms of his ontology, a human being’s dissent from Being in general or any mental instance of primary or even secondary beauty, results in the comparative diminution of that human being’s existence (or, at least, the contracting of it). Which is to say, natural conscience is the mental perception of a human being’s ‘disagreeableness’ or ‘contradiction’ with its own relational existence within the matrix of divine beauty. Conversely, true ease of conscience is a human being’s ‘consistency’ with self, proper ‘consent to its own being’, and a harmonious relation of the beautified self.<sup>168</sup> In short, a ‘good conscience’ is ‘some image’ of the psychological (and ultimately, ontological) oneness of the Triune Divine Being.<sup>169</sup>

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The theocentric influences in Edwards’ thought display both his originality as a philosophical theologian and a desire to remain within the parameters of his tradition. We also see him one moment as a man of his age, borrowing from Stoddard, Shaftesbury, Locke, Malebranche and perhaps Berkeley, while in the next moment departing from them with some novel application or theory. In all cases, however, what dominates his thought about man’s basic ontic constitution are God and the world of ideas that God categorically determines for some telos.<sup>170</sup>

To empathize with his depiction of man means rethinking reality in light of God’s programmatic purposes – sometimes in ways that run counter to common sense. Edwards is not afraid to employ and reinvent concepts that conflict with stalwarts in his tradition in order to hold fast to his vision of God’s end. His innovative reconception of the self-love is a prime example. He does not merely empower self-love with dispositional status; he makes it the ontological axle upon which his moral theory and God’s telic-orientation for man turn.

#### **4. *Neutral and ‘Inordinate’ Self-Love***

Though Edwards asserts that love of one’s own happiness, or individual self-love is ‘universal’ in all and ‘the same degree in all,’ he nevertheless has two distinct usages of self-

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<sup>167</sup> *TV*, *Works*8, 589.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 589-99; ‘The Mind’ 1, *Works*6, 336. Taken further, ‘natural conscience,’ JE would argue, is never at ease until it reaches full union with Being in general, through Jesus Christ. Only then may one exercise himself in thought and action (and even then, only by degrees) in a manner agreeable with the law of the whole. Only then does one’s existence begin to be ‘happy’ and unified. Ramsey underscores the significance of JE’s idea of conscience with relation to his ethical theory when he adds, ‘The spontaneous reflex of ease or disease may be the reason Edwards is willing to have *his* understanding of conscience called the “moral sense” ... In any case, conscience is not an intuition. It is not Francis Hutcheson’s “moral sense” that registers approbation upon an apprehension of benevolence wherever it may be found.’ Ramsey insightfully concludes, ‘For Edwards, conscience is, itself, a relation’, but then limits this thought to the spheres of psychological constitution and moral philosophy by adding, ‘It is golden rule morality writ small in the self’s consciousness *to self*’ (‘EI’, *Works*8), 42-43.

<sup>169</sup> ‘M’94, 96, 98, and 1263.

<sup>170</sup> ‘M’94, *Works*13, 257-63.



love: essential or ‘natural’ self-love (the topic of the foregoing discussion) and ‘inordinate’ or nefarious self-love.<sup>171</sup> The former is an ontological disposition. As such, it is a natural instance of proportion. Morally speaking, in and of itself it is neutral; but if governed by ‘a superior supernatural principle’ of divine love (the Holy Spirit), its active tendency may very well be truly virtuous.<sup>172</sup> The latter usage, however, is strictly negative. For example, in ‘M’530, the first mention of self-love is virtually synonymous with immoral selfishness; the second is descriptive of the ontic principle in man:

Self-love is either simple mere self-love, which is a man’s love to his own proper single and separate good, [or it] is what arises simply and necessarily from the nature of a perceiving and willing being. It necessarily arises from that without the supposition of any other principle. I therefore call it simple self-love because it arises simply from that principle, viz. the nature of a perceiving willing being ... [it is] the necessary nature of a perceiving and willing being.<sup>173</sup>

This entry illustrates the importance of discerning which use Edwards intends whenever the subject enters into one of his theological, ethical or philosophical discussions, as it frequently does. If confusion arises, it usually stems from his use of the same phrase for both employments. What may add to the confusion is that self-love, as a principle or *habitus*, is the same in both cases. Man has only one disposition of self-love, but it may be morally neutral (as the case may be with newborn infants), negatively immoral (per natural-man), or positively virtuous (concreated Adam and the potential of regenerate persons).

#### 4.a. Essential Self-Love

The neutral use, as the above quote indicates, is natural and intrinsic to man’s being. Despite the idea of self-love being, from time to time in certain Protestant and Roman Catholic quarters, associated with *επιθυμία* or condemnable *φιλαίτια* or narrow selfishness, Edwards

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<sup>171</sup> In this sense, ‘natural’ is synonymous with inherent. ‘Common self-love’ may be added to the list of negative usages. Augustine and Aquinas likewise distinguished between a ‘neutral,’ ‘universal’ self-love and ‘perverse’ self-love. Cf. O’Donovan, *The Problem of Self-love in St. Augustine*, 93-111 and *Summa Theologia*, II-II, 27.7.

<sup>172</sup> *Charity*, Works8, 253. See Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 171-72; and Ramsey, (Ed.), *Works8*, 252-53 n.1.

<sup>173</sup> Works18, 134. Other Puritans make a similar distinction between ‘natural self-love’ and corrupt self-love, deemed the ‘root’ of sin. For example, Matthew Henry (1662-1714) says, ‘There is a self-love which is corrupt, the root of the greatest sins, and it must be put off and mortified: but there is a self-love which is natural, and the rule of greatest duty, and it must be preserved and sanctified’ (note on Mt. 22:34-40, *An Exposition of All the Books*). Another JE favorite, Matthew Poole (1624-79) explains self-love just as Henry (see Mt. 22:39 and Gal. 5:14 in *Synopsis Criticorum*). Neither, however, goes so far as to distinguish self-love as an essential ontic principle. Later, several thinkers come much closer to JE’s meaning, yet without the same ontological sophistication. For instance, Adam Clarke (1762-1832) would say seventy years later: ‘Self-love ... has been grievously declaimed against, even by religious people, as a most pernicious and dreadful evil. But ... If I am to love my neighbour as *myself* and this “love worketh no ill to its neighbour,” then *self-love*, in the sense in which our Lord uses it, is something excellent. It is properly a disposition essential to our nature, and inseparable from our being, by which we *desire* to be happy, by which we seek the happiness we have not, and rejoice in it when we possess it. In a word, it is a uniform wish of the soul to avoid all evil, and to enjoy all good’ (*The Holy Bible ... with Commentary and Critical Notes*, 5:375).

<sup>173</sup> Works8, 254.



did not shy away from regularly employing the term with neutral or even distinctly positive theological-anthropological connotations. In this, he consciously aligns himself with those within the Reformed tradition that look to Augustine not Calvin on the issue of self-love.

Augustine, showing his debt to Plotinus, formulated a theology of natural principles, the maxim of which was, ‘All men desire to live happily.’<sup>174</sup> Thinking processes, motives, volitional acts, human behavior, and biblical anthropology were explicated upon this premise. ‘Happiness’, then, is achieved when ‘that which is man’s chief end is both loved and possessed.’<sup>175</sup> The pursuit of happiness, specifically happiness found in God, was extolled as a principal Christian virtue. When the principal desire in man (*amor sui*) was directed toward God it was sanctified, when toward anything else it was sinful – there was no difference between Christian love for God and ‘proper’ self-love. Augustine’s eudaimonistic conception of the moral law had no place either for a virtue of self-love independent of love for God or love of God without self-love. In man’s telic quest for happiness, he manifests true love for himself by pursuing it in a relationship with God and ‘finds his repose’.

The line from Perkins to Stoddard advances the Augustinian notion of self-love to Edwards, and underscores two points: (1) that God works with created aspirations of human nature to achieve His purposes; and (2) that true charity desires fulfillment in union, while selfishness epitomizes isolation and estrangement, in a word, sinfulness. Both themes are picked up in Edwards. The first became the cornerstone of his teaching on ‘preparation’ or ‘seeking’, among other things;<sup>176</sup> the second is important in his ontology of internal relations, upon which his ‘preparationism’ is based, as well as his hamartiology.

Luther, of course, branded the Augustinian notion of self-love ‘*amor concupiscentiae*’.<sup>177</sup> Luther’s commentary on Romans everywhere condemns human acquisitive desire.<sup>178</sup> The Wittenberg Reformer, therefore, joined a litany of clerics dating back to Theodore, Lombard, and Duns Scotus, in rejecting ‘the wicked filth which theologians call “self-love”’, in favor of a system in which self-denial was the defining feature of true (Christian) love.<sup>179</sup>

Calvin agreed. In his *Institutes*, he denounced self-love and strove to purge the Augustinian emphasis on it from the Christian ethic, and replace it with a non-teleological abandonment to God’s sovereignty.<sup>180</sup> Hell was to be preferred rather than have God’s glory dishonored. From the reformers’ collective position the doctrine of *resignatio ad infernum*

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<sup>174</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, x:1. Plotinus pictured even an ‘ugly’ soul pursuing beauty since its intellect (the soul’s essence) was beautiful ‘like to God’ (*Enneads*, 1.6.4-6).

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. Chapter V, §5.

<sup>177</sup> *WA*, 56:391.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 304f, 325, 391f.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 391f; 18:486. I am indebted to Stephen G. Post’s *Christian Self-Love and Self-Denial*, c. 2, for the substance of this and the following paragraph.

<sup>180</sup> *Institutes*, II.1.2; II.7.6; III.7.1.



was reintroduced.<sup>181</sup> Doctrines of total sovereignty and a self-denial-theology of the cross de-emphasized concern for well-being. François Fénelon, Cotton Mather, and Edwards' disciple, Samuel Hopkins,<sup>182</sup> all critiqued the Augustinian position and rejected a theology of natural principles to advocate in its place a 'pure love' of benevolent disinterestedness (Fénelon) or suffering (Mather) or self-negation vis-à-vis God's will (Hopkins), among other things.

Such thought not only ran counter to the most basic principle of Edwards' ethical theory, as the whole treatise *True Virtue* shows, but also his theory of being. So opposed was he to this kind of thinking that he labors in *Charity and Its Fruits*, *True Virtue*, and many sermons, to dispel strictly negative connotations of self-love through an explanation of it that did not necessarily involve sin – the anti-Augustinians' core accusation against self-love. His motive was not to align himself with his grandfather in the long-standing Mather-Stoddard feuds (he would oppose Stoddard as well as support him),<sup>183</sup> but to articulate an ethic based upon an ontology that reflected internal metaphysical cogency and yet was empirically justifiable (answerable to the likes of John Taylor, George Turnbull, and Francis Hutcheson) and manifested biblical integrity (answerable to competing Calvinists). His *modus operandi* was not to link self-love so close to human nature that its exercise was characteristic of its nature, as Augustine had done. Instead, he openly equates human nature with a self-love disposition. Consider his comments in *Charity*:

It is not a thing contrary to a Christian that a man should love himself; or what is the same thing, that he should love his own happiness. Christianity does not tend to destroy a man's love to his own happiness; [for if it did] it would therein tend to destroy the humanity.... That a man should love his own happiness is necessary to his nature, as a faculty of the will is; and it is impossible that it should be destroyed in any other way than by destroying his being.<sup>184</sup>

The mere involuntarily possession of a principle of self-love is not sinful; it is necessary, natural and reasonable. As an essential principle of intelligent perceiving existence, it is neither necessarily praiseworthy nor blameworthy, though without it there is no human being.

To declare a principle of self-love inherently sinful, then, was to impugn God as the designer and fashioner of an inherently sinful principle in man, from the genesis event itself.<sup>185</sup> Such a position fails to see the necessity of this principle for voluntary choosing: the 'will' does not constitute a real entity but is an expression of the strongest motive in a person's character – to be sure, the motive for choosing is the governing ontological disposition within a person.

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<sup>181</sup> 'Reintroduced', i.e. from the medieval mystical tradition. George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 78.

<sup>182</sup> The *resignatio* doctrine is especially associated with Hopkins' *A Dialogue between A Calvinist and Semi-Calvinist*, where he sets forth his formula for a 'willingness to be damned for the glory of God.'

<sup>183</sup> See, *Dwight Life*, 301-02.

<sup>184</sup> *Works*8, 254. Cf. Stoddard's similar statements in *Three Sermons Lately Preach'd*, 36.

<sup>185</sup> Here JE differs from not only those following in Calvin's footsteps, but also twentieth-century Lutheran ethicist Anders Nygren (*Agape and Eros*, c. 4), whose condemnation of self-love, as Gene Outka demonstrates in *Agape*, 'applies exhaustively to all "natural" possibilities' (58-59).



Love of oneself, or the love of one's own happiness, is necessary for any preferring, choosing, or inclining of the will, as well as understanding and perceiving that which is 'good' to/for the self: this is the ethical side of *Freedom of the Will* – disposition decides the matter concerning morality and human behavior. Indeed, as Edwards writes in *Freedom of the Will*, it 'causes' the effect of morality.<sup>186</sup> Stoddard's eudaimonistical statement, 'It is lawful for [natural-men] to aim at themselves' in happiness, carries over into Edwards' definition of natural self-love as love of one's own happiness. This principle, as the foremost orientation of the self, operates in, as, and through, the unified intellectual and the inclinational activities. In short, it is simply one's ability to value what he or she is inclined to value, namely, one's own happiness.<sup>187</sup> To destroy this is tantamount to 'destroying [man's] being' made in the image of God. So, for one to love himself, viewed *simpliciter*, is for one to love his own happiness just as God loves His own happiness.<sup>188</sup>

Passages from Scripture are given as authoritative crowning evidence in the validation of a natural, non-sinful self-love. The appeal to Holy Writ is meant to convince gainsayers, from within Edwards' tradition and without, that his is no speculative moral philosophy but a biblical anthropology rooted in revelation. 'The Scripture,' he avers, 'from one end of the Bible to the other is full of things which are there held forth to work upon a principle of self-love.' Essential self-love, 'is no fruit of the Fall, but is necessary and what belongs to that nature of all intelligent beings which the Creator hath made, that it is alike in all.'<sup>189</sup>

The effectiveness of Edwards' arguments and appeal to Scripture in *Charity* and *True Virtue* is difficult to measure. On the one hand, if we consider that his own pupil, Samuel Hopkins, advocated adherence to the *resignatio* doctrine and equated all self-love with sinfulness, then Edwards did not fare so well. On the other hand, it was Hopkins (along with Joseph Bellamy) who posthumously published *Two Dissertations* and saw the *resignatio* doctrine vilified and rejected as a stipulation for ordination. But it was also Hopkins and Bellamy who were the principal architects of the 'New Divinity', which did little to reflect Edwards' teachings on natural, non-sinful self-love as an essential and defining principle of human beingness.<sup>190</sup> In

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<sup>186</sup> *Works*1, 333. Cf. in the same treatise, Part IV §1 'The Essence of the Virtue and Vice of Dispositions of the Heart, and Acts of the Will, Lies Not in Their Cause, But Their Nature'.

<sup>187</sup> 'M'530, *Works*18, 73-76. In his *Essay*, Locke also developed a theory of desire in which 'happiness, and that alone' moves it.

<sup>188</sup> Ramsey, 'EI', *Works*8, 15. Here Ramsey notes a radical difference between JE and the Augustinian tradition. He writes, 'In that tradition, a telling response to the account of the Augustinian "synthesis" ... would be to carve out a legitimate place for *creatures*' "need-love" to God—as did C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves* ... JE would not have limited himself to that rejoinder' (ibid., 15-16 n. 8). Ramsey's point is that, in correlating the nature of the will with love, and of love with happiness, JE requires the inference that 'happiness' cannot be other than '*one's own*' while it is willed and loved and enjoyed.

<sup>189</sup> *Works*8, 255: "'Saints and sinners" in this life love happiness alike, and have the same unalterable propensity to seek and desire happiness.'

<sup>190</sup> Dwight and JE Jr. continued Hopkins and Bellamy's trend to view sin as an accumulation of actions rather than primarily a state of being based on a self-loving nature or disposition issuing in evil deeds.



the end, ‘New England Theology’ found Edwards’ analysis too deterministic (and perhaps too innovative and therefore ‘disturbing’) and opted for a less constrained notion of individual freedom and human ability.

In his repudiation of the *resignatio* and leveling of essential human nature—for all mankind—to a self-loving disposition, Edwards, so far from ‘asserting God at the expense of humanity’, as Alexander V.G. Allen charges, actually affirms the integrity of authentic human choice (as an expression of the strongest motive in a person’s ontic nature) and offers a single definition of ‘human being’ at a basic level.

#### **4.b. Inordinate Self-Love and the Deformity of the Reprobate**

The second way in which Edwards uses self-love is in his diagnosis of human depravity. Negative self-love, or what both he and Stoddard called ‘inordinate self-love,’ is the ‘cardinal principle of corruption’ from which every sinful thought and action arise (*M*747). However, it is not a distinct disposition in man that competes with natural self-love. There is only one principle of self-love. The ‘inordinate self-love’ of which Edwards speaks is a categorical designation of the *relational exercises* of the one disposition that are *limited to the self*. That is, the ‘inordinacy’ is descriptive of the intellectual and inclinational regard for the self to the exclusion of others—the *selfishness* that is endemic to fallen man.<sup>191</sup>

Prior to the Fall, man was governed by a third relational disposition (love to God), a ‘superior principle’ of holiness – the Holy Spirit. This was man’s concreated original righteousness. Man’s lapse, however, affected the loss of the ‘superior principles’, which kept the inclination to one’s own benefit in due subordination, reduced natural self-love to a mono-dimensional principle, not entirely dissimilar to Luther’s *incurvatus in se* thesis, nor Outka’s analysis of ‘acquisitive self-love’.<sup>192</sup> As Edwards argues, ‘[the] self-love which is the selfishness to which a Christian spirit is contrary is only an inordinate self-love.’<sup>193</sup>

Consequently, since the removal of the superior principles:

man’s self-love governs alone; and having not this superior principle to regulate it, breaks out into all manner of exorbitances, and becomes in innumerable cases a vile and odious disposition, and causes thousands of unlovely and hateful actions. There is nothing new put in the nature that we call sin, but only the same self-love that necessarily belongs to the nature working and influencing, without regulation from that superior principle that primitively belongs to our nature and that is necessary in order to the harmonious existing of it. This natural and necessary inclination to ourselves, without that governor and guide, will certainly without anything else reproduce, or rather will become, all those sinful inclinations which are in the corrupted nature of man.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Certainly JE was aware of the fact that Augustine, the Schoolmen, and even Malebranche owned a similar principle within their respective *ethical* systems.

<sup>192</sup> *WA*, 18:786; *Agape*, 56-63. See Chapter IV for JE’s dispositional account of man’s creation and fall.

<sup>193</sup> *Works*8, 577, 255.

<sup>194</sup> *M*301, *Works*13, 387.



In Edwards' analysis, self-love exclusively inclined to self has no regard or 'disposedness' toward holiness or the excellence of relations beyond the self:

Man naturally has no other principle to direct and govern him in his actions but only self-love. Man is born into the world ... with no other principle to direct and govern those [remaining] powers and their activity but self-love. Nothing else but this reins. So that we may easily know what judgment to make as to man's disposition. Man as he comes into the world has no principle of love to God. Nor has he any principle of love to men but only so far as self-love may in some cases be a principle to love to others and no further ... This being the only principle he has to govern him all that a man is prompted to pursue is his own private and separate interest then he will have no sincere regard at all to the glory of God or the good of others.<sup>195</sup>

This constitutes the heart of the Edwardsean moral inability, the strength of which rests on the ontological significance of self-love.<sup>196</sup> His doctrine of moral inability/natural ability only makes sense in this context. Though God has so ordered the self-love disposition to operate in, through, and as the intellectual and inclinational faculties, so that man is capable of approving and condemning all things whatsoever (that is, he has natural ability), yet he never loves excellence for the beauty and harmony of the whole. Man wills nothing other than what he selfishly deems his own good, for he possesses no other principle (i.e. the Holy Spirit) by which he may be inclined virtuously. For Edwards, 'true virtue', as distinguished from 'common' or non-spiritual virtue, is 'general beauty', that is, 'beautiful in a comprehensive view as it is in itself, and as related to everything that it stands in connection with.' In short, true virtue is 'love to being in general.'<sup>197</sup> The 'inordinacy' of the self-love disposition, then, lies in the fact that it operates without an excellent governing principle, divine love, and is exclusive.

Thus, the chief moral consequence of the Fall is the result of an ontological deficiency. Sinfulness is the catastrophic consequence of ontological deprivation. Moral inability, then, is dispositional; it consists of the present inability of an individual to dispose oneself *because of a lack of disposition* – viz. holiness, to that which is truly virtuous.

Man's sinfulness, however, does not merely lie in an ontological deprivation, which renders him totally unable to instance primary beauty in a mutually consenting relation; it is also positive. Morally speaking, 'inordinate self-love' is positively exercised as 'a man's

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<sup>195</sup> Matt. 10:17 (1731/2); cf. *TV, Works* 8, 577-79.

<sup>196</sup> The inability of the natural-man to do *any* act that *fundamentally* attains the divine standard (God's will and law); and the notion that unregenerate persons are unable to change their principal confined and exclusive preference for self (self-love) and sin, are called 'total inability.' Total inability does not mean that the natural-man is without ability to perform natural and civil good, and external religious acts. He simply cannot attain to the divine standard, which requires *true virtue* (the product of infused love and faith) to initiate, color, and effect all such motions. JE and the New School of New England (e.g. Bellamy, Nathaniel Taylor, and Lyman Beecher) distinguished between moral and natural inability (see *Works* 1, 159-62). The import of their teaching states that natural-man still possesses all the natural faculties that are required for doing spiritual good (intellect, will, etc.), but lacks moral ability, that is, the ability to give proper direction to those faculties. The distinction under consideration is advanced in order to stress the fact that man is willfully sinful. JE's influential distinction was not new to Reformed theology: Turretin made a similar distinction in his *Institutes* (1:681-83).

<sup>197</sup> *TV, Works* 8, 541.



regard to his confined *private self*, or love to himself with respect to his *private interest*.' By 'private' Edwards means that which most immediately consists in those pleasures, or pains, that are strictly *personal* and at the expense of others (or the whole). Religiously, inordinate self-love positively disposes the agent to 'dissent' to 'Being in general', which in turn renders them a 'deformity' or 'irregularity' within God's beautiful matrix.<sup>198</sup>

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For Edwards, when all things are considered, the beauty of the relation to self *by itself*, such that the reprobate would and could only exhibit per the logic of his dispositionally determined ethics, is 'so debased as to become little or less, as bad or worse, than nothing' ('M'41). The almost non-being of the reprobate is the result of two things: the relative simplicity of their beauty, and the deforming consequences of positively dissenting to 'Being in general'. The comparative non-complexity of their beauty is due to the fact that, though the relation to self, by itself, is indeed mental and therefore an instance of primary beauty (it may still be regarded by God), yet because of its near isolation from other beings, and positive dissent to 'Being in general', its beauty is so diminished so as to become almost secondary.<sup>199</sup>

One wonders how this catastrophic alteration in the reprobate's being could possibly add to the beautification of God? That is, how is their deformity a part of maximal excellency? Edwards' answer is found in an analysis of the second relation determinative to being.

### **5. Being Consenting to Beings: The Relation to Others**

Earlier I stated that the most important implication of Edwards' definition of excellence is the claim that every being must, as a condition of its reality, stand in some relation to other things, and even to all other things.<sup>200</sup> When Sang Lee began to explore this facet of Edwards' model for ontological structure through a presentation of the first of its three important elements, namely, 'what an entity is, is inseparable from its relations,'<sup>201</sup> he had in mind to clarify how relations are internal to being. Though Lee neglects the ideal substance of man and sometimes fails to equate things with ideas, yet how his analysis of the internalness of relations relates to 'the consent of being to beings' is clear: human beings are not merely constituted by a lawlike disposition of self-relation, but also a disposition of *other*-relation.<sup>202</sup>

The disposition of other-relatedness is significantly more determinative to a human being's status, value, and position within the 'scale of being', than mere self-relation. We may

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<sup>198</sup> See 'M'747, *Works* 18, 391-92 and 'M'950, 1032 [TS Beinecke]. Cf. Augustine, *Enchiridion*.

<sup>199</sup> I say 'near isolation' because the reprobate's basic ontic structure makes it neither a stark singularity nor an isolated existence. In JE's system, there is no such thing as total aesthetic detachment or total ethical disinterestedness.

<sup>200</sup> *Philosophical Theology*, 77.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> 'M'864 [TS Beinecke]. See Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 193f.



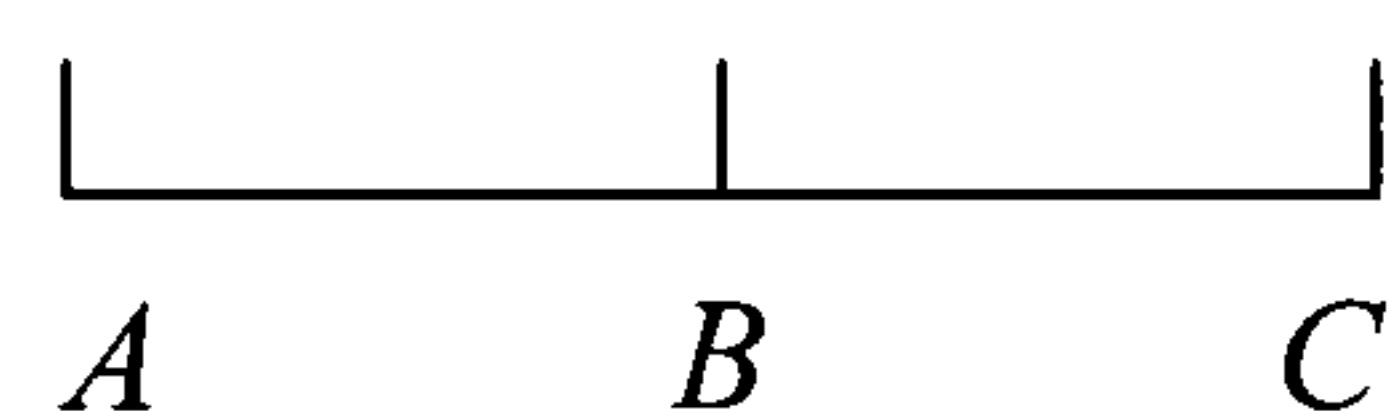
say, therefore, that the disposition of other-relatedness is not merely the extension of the primary relation of self-love, though within the interpersonal relations of fallen man, it may be so considered. Instead, the disposition of other-relatedness brings with it a transformed notion of self-love. In fact, the primary exercise of the essential disposition of a human being is always and indissolubly in conjunction with the exercise of this second disposition. Ideally, then, self-love is exercised not as narrow, isolated self-consent, but as a consenting to man's existence in a manner harmonious with the law of the whole or the beauty of God.<sup>203</sup>

Self-relation introduces man's existence on the 'scale of being' and designedly renders it more excellent than non-sentient entities by virtue of the arbitrary and mental kind of its existence: erstwhile, other-relation determines the *particular* quality of existence. By these two ontological factors Edwards establishes a hierarchy among sentient beings.

### 5.a. *The Complex Beauty of Mental Existence*

The second relation connects the first and most basic instance of 'proportion' with other 'minds' and thereby exhibits a more complex instance of proportion or excellence.<sup>204</sup> This *mutual consent between minds* is the greatest kind of beauty and/or love, and may be quantified in order to determine the specific excellence and 'realness' of a human being.<sup>205</sup>

The complexity of relational or *interrelational* beauty has to do with superiority of mental or spiritual beauty juxtaposed to the inferiority of natural or material beauty.<sup>206</sup> The former is 'primary beauty' and the latter 'secondary'. Natural beauty is a simple equality, or may be reduced to simple equalities. It is being-as-manifest. In a figure from 'The Mind,' Edwards illustrates simple beauty thus:



The equality between *AB* and *BC* constitute a simple beauty – a simple ratio or correspondence, where *AB* is similar to *BC*, or the relation of *C* to *B* is the equivalent of *B* to *A*. This is the lowest or simplest kind of beauty 'because by equality or likeness one part consents with but one part.'<sup>207</sup>

<sup>203</sup> *Charity, Works8*, 252-71.

<sup>204</sup> 'The Mind' 45, *Works6*, 363-65.

<sup>205</sup> 'M'398, *Works13*: 'There is no other way of different spirits being thus united, but by love' (463).

<sup>206</sup> In 'The Mind' 1, JE intimates a distinction between being consenting to other being(s) and the *mutual* consent of beings (*Works6*, 335). Although JE there gives priority to the whole of universal harmony and beauty, yet we may conclude that the consent of being *A* to being *B*, while in itself is excellent and significant for *A*, yet without the mutual consent of *B* the exhibited beauty of relation *AB* is limited and of the harmony of the whole {*A*, *B*} comparatively diminished. See *TV, Works8*, 561-62.

<sup>207</sup> 'The Mind' 62, *Works6*, 380; 334. JE is not saying that a particular object of natural beauty, such as a flower, tree, man's body, etc., does not embody a complicated harmony – quite the opposite. A flower, for example, is composed of 'millions of equalities' and, therefore, when viewed as a whole, a complicated harmony. Yet, every particular (minute) examination of it may be reduced to a simple equality. Natural beauty, then, is really a complicated collection of simple equalities. When one draws



Proportion, however, is *complex beauty*, and involves a complex nexus of relations, where even one part ‘may sweetly consent to ten thousand different parts, all the parts may consent with the rest, and not only so, but the parts taken singly may consent with the whole taken together.’ Edwards provides the following example of complex beauty:

$$\begin{array}{cccc} \dot{A} & \dot{B} & \dot{C} & \dot{D} \\ A & B & C & D \end{array}$$

While *BCD* is ‘similar’ to *ABC*, yet there now are three terms necessary in each of the parts between which is the relation, so that here simple beauties such as correspondency, symmetry and regularity are omitted.<sup>208</sup> Nonetheless, explains Edwards, there is a ‘general complex beauty.’ Viewed as particulars, there are no simple equalizes present in this example of complex beauty. Viewed as a whole, however, and despite its irregularity, there is proportion – *a complex beauty*, where *BC* is not as *AB*, nor *CD* as *BC*, yet *BCD* is as *ABC*. It is this kind of proportion which is analogous to, or, to use Edwards’ description, ‘shadows’ primary beauty – *the mutual consent of minds*. The important thing to note at present is that, complex beauty contains irregularities which enhance its beauty. Theoretically, it follows for Edwards, that the greater the more complex the beauty, then greater the representation of irregularity.

Primary beauty by definition is a *consciously perceived* beauty, rather than a standing equality.<sup>209</sup> The capable perceiving agent, however, does not merely apprehend this or that occasion of primary beauty; rather, in a monodimensional or mutual consenting relation it itself becomes an instance of primary beauty – excellency or proportion.

What remains unclear is Edwards’ account of disagreeableness to being. One wonders what arrangement of dots on a page would not be a complex beauty? His only criteria is curiously elusive: ‘disagreeableness is pain’. Disproportion, he tells us, will be disagreeable with our being; it will grate us. But precisely how this happens is left unanswered by him.

Unconcerned with these details, Edwards nonetheless bases the hierarchy of sentient beings upon a theory that values the extent of an agent’s conscious perception of primary proportion; and correspondingly devalues an agent’s relational dissent and inability to perceive primary proportion. The conscious perception of primary beauty intellectually and

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back even further to view, say, the flower within its environmental context then one is able to discern that all the natural motions and tendencies and figures of bodies in the universe are done according to proportion. Therein lies their general beauty or universal proportion – ‘shadows’ of primary beauty.

<sup>208</sup> As stated in Lee, *Philosophical Theology*.

<sup>209</sup> *Works*6, 336. I say this recognizing that for JE natural beauty also is an idea perceived by minds. Speaking of the beauty itself, natural beauty has simplicity as to its laws, whereas, according to JE, complex beauty requires a perceptual dynamic beyond the mere acknowledgment and appreciation of simple equalities. It has a mental complexity. So while there is no ‘unconscious’ perception and all perception is by the unified consciousness, which means that all that is perceived each and every moment is mentally adjudicated as agreeable or disagreeable to an *IPB*, yet if an *IPB* were only to perceive the secondary beauty of *x* it would not be discerning the mind or mental/ spiritual/moral aspect in *x* (i.e. God), and the ‘consent of minds’ would not be achieved. Thus Fiering: ‘For Edwards all that is normally meant by “beauty” was to be understood only as a *symbolic* counterpart to a higher correspondence, that of wills’ (*Moral Thought*, 82).



inclinationally relates the subject to the object, and therefore makes it an occasion of ‘excellency’. Earlier we saw how Edwards equates perceiving primary beauty with spiritual ‘sight’ or ‘sensibility,’ as well as how he equates the ability to perceive primary beauty with regeneration. Here, we have the ontological thinking behind it: while the perceiving agent does become an instance of primary beauty, it is only by way of *participating* in the larger schema of *divine beauty*.<sup>210</sup> Such are the metaphysics behind his doctrine of union with Christ.

The participation in primary (divine) beauty, then, is the quantifying factor for the value of being. Edwards’ universal definition of excellency requires as much: ‘The consent of being to being, or being’s consent to entity. The more the consent is, and the more extensive, the greater is the excellency.’<sup>211</sup> A being’s consent to an entity or another being produces a multiplication of relations – not in terms of secondary, but primary beauty: for the whole of existence is a network of relations. Natural-man is capable of perceiving the secondary beauty in all things. But an excellent relation, a relation of mutual consent is necessary to perceive primary beauty. With this in mind, I imagine that Edwards would calculate the value of being on his scale in the following manner:

If being *A* consents to *B*, then the context of *B* may be included in that relation. Hence, *AB(x)*.

Additionally,

Any *AB* relation implies the consent of *A* to ‘Being in general’ or *B(x~)*.

He arrives at the second of these by an ultimate inclusion of entity into ‘Being in general’:

God is proper entity itself, and these two [i.e. being and entity] therefore in him become the same; for so far as a thing consents to being in general, so far it consents to him.<sup>212</sup>

The calculus of value, which determines the specific ‘degree of existence’ and ‘degree of excellence’ of each and every being, ultimately rests upon a paradigmatic relation to God, who (through Christ) connects any being *A* with another being *B* and the extent of *B*’s relations (*x*). In other words, if *A* consents to *B*, then God—whose ‘*ad extra*’ reality is His idea or image of Himself, that is, His Son—is present in, as, and through the consent, and is consented to by the network design of relations that extends *A*’s consent to *B(x)*.<sup>213</sup> Thus, value, existence, and excellency increase proportionately as *A* consents to {*x*} or *C(x)*, or *D(x)*, etc., or a combination of these relations. As *A* extends its relations or gives greater more pervasive consent, the more *A* internalizes proportion, and consequently, replicates and participates in divine beauty or excellency.<sup>214</sup> Theologically this is called *theosis*, the

<sup>210</sup> See ‘M’210 and 211 where JE makes this explicit (*Works*13, 342).

<sup>211</sup> ‘The Mind’ 1, *Works*6, 336.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 337. Cf. *EofC*, *Works*8, 461.

<sup>213</sup> Job 11:12 (1731/2), 14, 17.

<sup>214</sup> ‘M’214, *Works*13, 358.



divinization of human beings via a participatory union with the Divine Being. It can also be explained through Edwards' aesthetic language of happiness:

The creature is no further happy with this happiness which God makes his ultimate end than when he becomes one with God. The more happiness the greater the union: when the happiness is perfect, the union is perfect.

Consequently, the nearer in nature (likeness) beings are to God, 'so much the more properly are they beings, and more substantial; and that spirits are much more properly beings, and more substantial, than bodies.'<sup>215</sup> However, for Edwards, the dual experience of individuality in participation is the real basis for personal relationship and identity. The value of individuality is not diminished but enhanced by being's proximity (in terms of likeness) to God.

### **5.b. *The Place of Reprobate in the Matrix of Divine Beauty***

The natural-man, as one who is governed by a self-loving disposition alone, may be understood to be a self-referential being who never engages in truly excellent mutual consent. Yet, natural-man possesses an ability to appreciate the secondary beauty of all being, even after the Fall: 'The *cause* why secondary beauty is pleasing to *men* is only a *law of nature*, which God has fixed'.<sup>216</sup> This law is an active, dispositional tendency of consent to secondary beauty. Thus man is, by his very ontological structure, *other*-related.

To explain why God designed intelligent beings to be disposed to secondary beauty, Edwards resorts to a calculus of values once again. He explains that this kind of beauty affects the minds more (other things being equal) when taken notice of in objects which have considerable more importance 'than trivial matters.' Thus, the symmetry of the parts of the body affects the mind more than the beauty of a flower; likewise, the beauty of the universe more than a tree.

But Edwards gives another reason why God made this kind of inferior consent and agreement of things secondarily beautiful:

there is in it some image of the true, spiritual original beauty ... consisting in being's consent to being, or the union of minds or spiritual beings in a mutual propensity and affection of heart.<sup>217</sup>

Secondary beauty, then, bespeaks, mirrors, shadows, or is an image of that beauty which is spiritual, and therefore truly excellent. Through the uniformity of simple equalities diverse things become, as it were, one, as it is in the cordial union of primary beauty.

Ultimately, however, it is because God is pleased 'to observe analogy in his works' that the universe of created existence is a matrix of divine beauty.<sup>218</sup> The analogy of secondary

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<sup>215</sup> 'M' 135, *Works* 13, 295; *TV*, *Works* 8, 533-34; 'Natural Philosophy' No. 44, *Works* 6, 238.

<sup>216</sup> *TV*, *Works* 8, 561-62.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 564.



beauty is simply another dimension of the matrix that is the externalization of the divine beautifying disposition. This analogy then serves in a facilitating capacity for God's self-glorification, as various divine attributes are replicated via the perception of created minds. In turn, however, God's establishing inferior things in an analogy to superior things assists the minds of created beings in their apprehension of divine realities: hence the value of typological associations.<sup>219</sup>

The reality that the analogy represents is God's complex beauty. And here we find the ultimate aesthetic function and value of the reprobate. For Edwards, God's being is infinitely the most excellent being, which means it consists of the greatest complexity, that is, the greatest composition of complex beauty. Such a complexity would necessarily include 'irregularities' or 'deformities', as he calls them, per his theory of excellency or proportion as complex beauty. The reprobate are, ontologically speaking, such irregularities or deformities. Hence, the ontological 'irregularity' of reprobates (when considered in light of the whole matrix of beautiful Being in general) is actually a significant contribution to the complexity of God's beautiful being. That is, reprobates positively contribute to the overall '*ad extra*' beauty of God, by replicating/remanating the 'irregularities necessary for its *complexity*'.<sup>220</sup>

Edwards is not afraid to follow consistently the logic of his aesthetic ontology, even to this surprising conclusion: God's being includes, as it were, 'irregularities' and 'deformities'. Following the logic of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, who both said in their consideration of the universe as a whole that, if you have a state of affairs that is good, it does not necessarily follow that every detail is good, Edwards makes a further, more daring panentheistic application to the being of God. However, the thinking for doing so is well established in his theological tradition.<sup>221</sup> At present, however, we must understand this idea as the logical consequence of Edwards' aesthetic ontological ruminations, not his theology. If we consider the reprobate as such, then we may see them not as an 'unaccounted for' different kind of human beings with some irreconcilable ontology, but as a necessary factor in Edwards' conception of Being in general's excellence.

But would not this thinking violate the *Deus simplicitum* theory? Edwards does not think so. He acknowledges no distinction between God (a beautiful Being) and His ideal essence (of infinite excellency or proportion). Therefore, in his way of thinking, God is simple

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> See Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 112-17.

<sup>220</sup> JE articulates a similar idea in a theodicy pertaining to the harmony of the universe. To understand more fully what God's righteousness is, JE claimed that it is necessary to recognize that God aims at one thing, the expression of His glory in the harmonious interplay of all elements within His world: 'God inclines to excellency, which is harmony, but yet he may incline to suffer that which is unharmonious in itself, for the promotion of universal harmony, or for the promoting of the harmony. That then is in the universality, and making it shine the brighter' (*Works*3, 356-57). Cf. '*M*'553, *Works*18, 97.

<sup>221</sup> See Augustine, *Enchiridion*; and Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, I, 6.3, 4.



because His ideal essence of an infinitely complex beauty is perfectly and totally integrated in all that God is and does, all that He knows and loves, that is, in the Son and the Spirit. For this reason Edwards admits no distress with God purposely orchestrating the Fall, decreeing sin and evil, and facilitating pain, suffering, and damnation. (But more on this in the next Chapter.)

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Edwards' philosophy of being holds that a being not only is defined or constituted through its relations, but also exists as to itself and God's predetermined series only through its relations. That is, its existence is established, appraised, and determined through relations that God prescribes. The whole of reality is, as it were, a network of interrelated relationships.

The second relation of Edwards' model for ontological structure carries with it, then, the implication of the absolute comprehensive extent of the mutual relations of all entities. This may be seen through his categorization and appraisal of the existence and value in the larger context of the network of relations that is the matrix of divine beauty.

Thus, the beauty or excellence of God is the standard, point of reference, goal or 'end,' and defining reality for all beings. All value and substantiality of being is to be understood in terms of 'nearness of relation' to God primarily, and other beings, derivatively. Being is not simply determined by being-in-relation, even to the whole of being, but being's quality and quantity of being-in-relation. Being-in-relation necessarily means being part of the network of relations, and to a 'degree' related to all relations. The moral and teleological dimensions within Edwards' philosophy of being are simply interchangeable. The operative word for Edwards, however, is 'degree'. Regenerate persons have more being and therefore are more real, while the reprobate are, in Edwards' comparative rhetoric, 'perfectly equivalent, or rather, less and worse than, no being.'<sup>222</sup> Though stated in the form of a hyperbole, reprobates are the least 'significant' category—*not kind*—of human being. Notwithstanding their sinfulness and relative ontological paucity, God created them with a purpose, which, by the telic-orientation of their ontic structure, they will attain. Their bare existence makes possible God's program to glorify Himself through them, and their continued existence gains it for Him. God's telic-comprehensiveness is total in the sphere of ontology: it does not discriminate between the spiritual man and the natural-man, or the elect and the reprobate.

### ***5.c. An Agent of Divine Glory***

According to Edwards' understanding of God's self-manifestive purposes, reprobates are unalterably fixed in their predestined state. They will never be able to attain the excellence of a mutually consenting relation, but must settle for secondary beauties. The reason why secondary beauty does not attain to primary beauty in and of itself should now be obvious –

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<sup>222</sup> *W*41, *Works*13, 223.



the sensation of secondary beauty is devoid of that immediate spiritual union and agreement (mutual consent) requisite in the sensation of primary and spiritual beauty.<sup>223</sup> Here it becomes easy to see how Jonathan Edwards would make ethical or even theological use of this theory.<sup>224</sup> One may not ascend from the ‘secondary beauty’ of the created order to the ‘primary beauty’ of God, unless there is a prior union (or participation) of being. Edwards does not allow for such a leap. The connection to excellent loving relations is an all or none deal. One is either in a primary, that is to say, a divinely beautiful relation, or one is not.<sup>225</sup> The movement is always from the superior to the inferior and back to the superior again, but never the superior terminating in the inferior, or from a state of inferiority to superiority. Hence the fundamental difference between ‘true virtue’ and ‘common morality’; hence, the difference between spiritually perceptive regenerates and ‘blind’ unregenerates.

Theologically and apologetically Edwards preserves the priority of regeneration, the integrity of spiritual realities, and the nature of the human experience of the beautiful, by insisting on an ontological union with a being who has comprehensive entitlements to primary beauty. Discussions about the damned have their place, but in the end Edwards (while perfectly convinced that there are in fact reprobates) admits that he can neither rightly identify them nor infallibly ‘sift the wheat from the chaff’.<sup>226</sup> For this reason the emphasis in his sermons and treatises rests upon a third and distinctive relational principle—a *disposition of love to God*. *End of Creation* becomes a metaphysical gospel narrative in the same way *True Virtue* is a meta-ethical gospel narrative. ‘How a man can be right with God’ is translated into ‘How a finite man (much less a sinful one) can have proportionate regard for an infinitely worthy being?’ The answer is that he cannot, unless he is united to an infinitely excellent being. For Edwards, this union or participation is in and with the Son, through the Spirit. It is by the Spirit—so united to the being of man and influencing his inclinational and intellectual activities in *direct mutual consent to God*—that man gains access to primary beauty.

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<sup>223</sup> Union in this sense is not to be understood in terms of absolute unification, but, as JE explains, a ‘propensity of *minds* to mental or spiritual existence.’

<sup>224</sup> JE’s response to the ‘moral sense’ writers, primarily Shaftesbury, Turnbull, and Hutcheson, also illuminates how his view of the natural world as analogous to the spiritual fit into his larger metaphysical system. As such, it composed an important element in JE’s defense of his thesis against the rationalists. The moralists’ epistemology posited that the reasoning mind could through nature discover what Shaftesbury called ‘first beauty’, identified as the immediate recognition of true virtue. ‘But’, as Mason Lowance explains, ‘in *True Virtue* Edwards sought to demonstrate his long-standing conviction that the “moral sense” that was being described was actually a secondary sort of cognition, and that naturalist aesthetics pertained merely to the world of types ... His distinction of beauty into primary and secondary was characteristic of his theology: Being-in-general was primary, spiritual and ultimately, divine; being-as-manifest was secondary, corporeal, and only a reflection of God’ (‘EI’, *Works*11, 18). I, of course, differ with Lowance’s last line by saying that being-as-manifest is *perceived* only as secondary by the natural-man and that its primary beauty or the excellency of God may be perceived in it by the regenerate.

<sup>225</sup> Or, soteriologically, one *becomes* through regeneration what one before was not.

<sup>226</sup> To be sure, JE does assert in *OS* that the self-love characteristics of reprobates, indeed, all men, are empirically discernible in their effects (*Works*3, 105-219).



The first two relational dimensions, Edwards insists, are to be governed by the third dimension. Only spiritual regeneration restores the ‘supernatural principle of divine love’ to the heart and the Holy Spirit to the throne of man’s governance. The Christian religion is the means by which that third relation is restored to the inner being of man, and it also provides the means by which the governing of the Spirit is increased (progressive sanctification).

This disposition facilitates truly virtuous relations with others through direct relation to God. Consider Edwards’ explanation in a 1731 MS sermon on Job 11:12:

Man before the fall saw so much of the excellency and glory of God ... and [it was] then when love to God reigned in his heart. This [i.e. a principle of love to God] made man to love his fellow creatures for those that love God will love the image of God, [that is] their neighbor also.

Several metaphysical principles stand behind this statement: the importance of relation to God, the interrelatedness of all being within the network of existence via the matrix of divine beauty, and the spiritual/moral dynamics of primary beauty. Significantly, the common feature in these things is a disposition of consent to Being in general.

Through an *IPB*’s union with the Spirit the essential self-love disposition is ‘governed’ or ‘regulated’ by the superior ‘arbitrariness’ of the disposition of love to God, and intellectually and affectionally values God as its beautiful object of true happiness. For, as Edwards affirms, the knowledge communicated is the knowledge of God and the love communicated is the love of God, and the happiness communicated is joy in God – all of which results in the expansive replication of God. In Edwards’ words,

In the creature’s knowing, esteeming, loving, and rejoicing in, and praising God, the glory of God is both exhibited and acknowledged; his fullness is received and returned. Here is both an *emanation* and *remanation*. The refulgence shines upon and into the creature, and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God, are something of God, and are refunded back again to their original. So that the whole is of God, and in God, and to God, and he is the beginning, and the middle, and the end.<sup>227</sup>

Thus, humanity functions in Edwards’ idealism as both receiver and relay of not only the general laws which constitute the reality of created existences, but also God’s self-communication toward self-enlargement in time and space.<sup>228</sup>

Whether Edwards discusses the disposition of love to God explicitly, or in the onerous metaphysical language of ‘being’, or couches its ontological density in theological, ethical, or aesthetic discourse, there are three fundamental principles latent in this disposition. These principles emerge time and again as Edwards discusses God’s self-glorification through human beings. The first principle of the third relation is one shared by the others; it is internal to being. Second, and as an expanded explanation of the first, the difference between direct constitutive consent to God and indirect, non-constitutive consent exactly corresponds to the

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<sup>227</sup> *EofC, Works8*, 531.

<sup>228</sup> Anticipating Chapter IV, this principle entails the replication of God’s redemptive attributes.



metaphysical differences between primary and secondary beauty. And third, although the lawlike tendency of love to God inseparably concurs with the exercising of the ‘self-love disposition,’ yet it is not a sinful thing, for the former ‘governs’ or ‘regulates’ the activity of the latter by virtue of its superior nature and ‘arbitrariness’.<sup>229</sup>

If we ask *why* Edwards makes this an ‘arbitrary’ feature of divine intercourse with His creation, then we find his theocentric impulse behind every answer, and that they all immediately suggest divine self-glorification. This is Edwards’ way of looking at the ‘big picture’ of existence. There is no simple or single etiological law for why God has fashioned man thus. In Edwards’ provision of a number of ‘fitting’ reasons (some logical, some ethical, others ontological), he keeps present before his mind the ‘chief end’ of all created existences – the multidimensional expansion of divine beauty. Consider the following reasons:

- (a.) The divine regulating of ‘the communication of ... more or less of His Holy Spirit’ is an exercise of divine sovereignty, and sovereign dispensations always are, for Edwards, ‘purely arbitrary.’<sup>230</sup>
- (b.) Thus, *IPBs* exist in a state of total dependency upon the divine will for the full achievement of their ontological potential (among other things).
- (c.) God designs His own ‘chief end’ to be their ‘chief end,’ and thereby establishes the potential (upon the consent of being to being in general) for the manifestation of the highest form of excellency to be effected, viz. the consent of minds.
- (d.) In this way God temporalizes Himself in a way consistent with His various biblical attributes, e.g. goodness, generosity, power, wisdom, etc.
- (e.) It accords with the ‘spiritual way of ideas’ (i.e. Idealism).
- (f.) It is religious or spiritual. And since man was created for the express purpose of spiritually and morally exercising his dispositional nature through the mind, the most spiritual and moral means ought to be utilized to obtain the end of ‘true religion.’

Other reasons could be added that give greater attention to the moral ‘fitness’ of the supernatural origin, dispensing, and exercise of the disposition of love to God, or to the primary beauty of such an arrangement, etc. One could even give a theological translation of each of the reasons listed, and so on.

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The ontological structure of *IPB* is inseparably connected with the actualization of that desire in God to find Himself glorified and replicated in temporality.<sup>231</sup> In Edwards’ idealism, the repetition or communication of God’s internal fullness in the temporal realm requires sentient creatures who can repeat in time God’s dynamic internal life. For this reason he says, ‘God has made intelligent creatures capable of being concerned in these effects, as being the willing active subjects, or means; and so they are capable of actively promoting God’s glory.’<sup>232</sup> Intelligent perceiving beings actuate the reality of God’s self-glorifying communication of His beauty in time and space. According to Edwards, the ontological facilitates the aesthetic:

<sup>229</sup> ‘M’1263, *PJE*, 186.

<sup>230</sup> ‘The Mind’ 45, *Works*6, 362; ‘M’1263, *PJE*.

<sup>231</sup> Lee expounds this point at greater length in *Philosophical Theology*, 196-210.

<sup>232</sup> ‘M’1218, *PJE*, 130.



there is a correspondence between the type of beauty and the dimension of its reality – secondary is shadow existence, primary is real.

## 6. *Concluding Remarks*

### 6.a. *Self-love and True Virtue*

While retaining positive and negative ethical connotations, Edwards makes self-love a universal, though not-necessarily-sinful, ontological principle. In doing so, he shows a strong affinity with the Thomist tradition. Within the Thomist tradition love has been used in a wide metaphysical sense to mean a movement toward, or a force maintaining cohesion and unity, whether of the universe at one extreme or of the individual personality at the other.<sup>233</sup> This idea of cohesion and unity has tended to yield an idea of self-love as a kind of personal ontological integrity, where one identifies with one's self and adheres to one's self. Viewed in this respect, self-love, so far from being the reviled among loves, becomes the archetype of all, a presupposition for all further loving relationships, which will, given the interrelatedness of all agents, necessarily lead on to other loving relationships. It is not difficult to see several points of contact between Edwards' notion of self-love and my sketch of the Thomist tradition. To mention just two, Edwards espouses a principle of cohesion or unity grounded in aesthetic/ontological notion of beauty. Secondly, the Edwardsean notion of self-love has its archetype in God. Yet the created disposition of self-love also functions in the role of the archetype, as the 'happiness' of created intelligent beings (even as found in and through other beings) ultimately terminates in a regard for self-being. In Edwards, the moral appraisal of all other creaturely loves is always determined by the moral perception of a human being.

It is also worth mentioning that Edwards' moral theory, like Thomas Aquinas', is a second order or derivative philosophical inquiry, grounded on the development of a dispositional view of human existence. It is a second order inquiry because it follows upon an analysis of the ontological theory of human being – his philosophical anthropology.

The demands of his biblical paradigm for 'true virtue', which should never be mistaken as a Christianized form of egoism or narcissism, can only be enforced if his ontology is in place. Ethical behavior is an evidence of something ontological. For Edwards, both normative ethical theory and the meta-ethics of true virtue depend upon a prior account of ontology.<sup>234</sup>

Edwards' work contributed little to nullifying the moral sense school (indeed, it has continued on through David Hume in the past to Roderick Firth and Richard Brandt in the present). It did, however, establish self-love on more metaphysically sure ground (ultimately looking

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<sup>233</sup> Bourke, *St. Thomas and the Greek Moralists*, 15-21; Barad, *Consent*.

<sup>234</sup> Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 11.



back to the Trinity) for the faction of Reformed theologians who empathize with his position. But his main objective was not to repudiate moral sense philosophy, but articulate *God's* end in creation and how He obtains it.

### **6.b. *The End for which God Created the World***

Jonathan Edwards circumnavigates a perennial problem in Reformed theology concerning the ontological question of the reprobate and their inherent worth by responding unapologetically about their nature and condition – even in the treatise *End of Creation*. His efforts to rehabilitate Calvinist doctrine led him to conceive of a new manner of incorporating the whole of creation, with all of its ontological and aesthetic irregularities, into redemption history (and, as mentioned above, God's ontological comprehensiveness).

Do reprobates have inherent ontological value? Are they properly human? Yes, of course, every soul is human, whether elect or not. But all of this is secondary for Edwards. The primary issue is God. Just as in *Two Dissertations* the *End for which God Created the World* precedes *The Nature of True Virtue*, so too we must understand that his total response to the Enlightenment is a restatement or redirection of the great question about reality (that is, about existence, purpose, and meaning), which is followed by the provision of a supposedly biblical answer to that question – an answer from one with a truly spiritual perspective (an 'error theory' perspective) on reality. The question, for Edwards, concerns not so much man's destiny, as God's gospel-oriented self-glorification grounded *in history* – the same history to which man is subject. Meta-ethics, metaphysics, and, above all, ontology are the underpinnings of such a response. What is more, its scope is all-inclusive, panentheistic, and availing: nothing is exempt from God's all-comprehensive being and telic purposes; not even the reprobate.



## **Chapter IV**

### ***God Glorified in Man's Existence***

1. Man, the Original
  - 1.a. Original Status, Original Righteousness, and Image of God
  - 1.b. A Diatribe on Human Nature
2. The Garden of Glorification
3. The First Sin: A Dispositional Account of the Fall
  - 3.a. A New Approach to an Old Problem
  - 3.b. A Species of Sinners
4. The Reprobate's Window on the World
  - 4.a. An Eternity of Hell Torments
  - 4.b. The Sinking of the Soul
5. Christ the Avenger
6. Concluding Remarks



## IV

### *God Glorified in Man's Existence*

END OF CREATION. There are many of the divine attributes that, if God had not created the world, never would have had any exercise.

*'Miscellanies' 553*

The proper functions of the three relational dimensions of a human being's ontological structure are not merely theoretical propositions of the ideal human. Rather, according to Edwards' literal understanding of Scripture, the first man, Adam, not only was created with these dispositions but lived and performed his intended telic role in God's scheme.

Though hardly considered a credible position for many today, Edwards unreservedly held the Genesis creation account to be literal. More accurately though, and somewhat as a departure from the early New England Puritan exegetical tradition ('the plain style'), he took the first eleven chapters of Genesis both literally and typologically.<sup>1</sup> The same could be said for much, if not all, of the Old Testament scriptures. When he read, 'God created man in his own image' he took it to mean that 'God was Adam's father and the earth was his mother';<sup>2</sup> that is, God literally formed Adam from the dust of the earth.<sup>3</sup> So when Edwards speaks of 'the first man,' he aligns himself to a tradition which regarded the Genesis narrative to be abundantly more than religious folklore for allegorizing; indeed, it was a non-fictional and trustworthy chronology of primitive humanity.<sup>4</sup>

Edwards sees in Scripture two men that have had incomparable roles in God's great plan of self-glorification: Adam and Jesus Christ. Adam's role was to initiate the divine beauty in this realm like no other creature, angelic or otherwise. Insofar as Adam walked with God in a state of innocence and obedience, brief as that period may have been, God was glorified through His self-replication in the temporal realm. The idealist circuit was complete: God communicated Himself in, through, and to an intelligent perceiving being, who, through his spiritual perception of the reality of the excellency of God, actuated the idea of the reality of the divine presence in the temporal world. God was, as it were, externalized and replicated. Actuating the idea of the reality of the divine presence, however, requires holiness, or intimate union with God. Holiness, for Edwards, is the distinguishing facet of humanity that perfects his nature theologically and morally. Adam possessed it as his original righteousness

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<sup>1</sup> For more on JE's principles of hermeneutic see Stein, 'The Quest for the Spiritual Sense', 99-113; and 'EI', *Works15*, 1-34.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Nakedness of Job' (1722), *Works10*, 405.

<sup>3</sup> See for examples, 'Scripture' Nos. 110, 322, and 399 (*Works15*, 81, 304-06, 396-99). In fact, the whole of JE's hermeneutical, ideological, theological, and philosophical foundations rest, at one place or another, on the belief that the Biblical record is indeed a supernaturally inspired chronicle of historical events, persons, and circumstances, as well as the only 'infallible' source of divine revelation.

<sup>4</sup> 'Scripture' No. 416, *Works15*, 423-69. Cf. Stein, 'EI', *Works15*, 14.



but was not ‘confirmed’ in it, while regenerate persons possess it by virtue of their union with the divine person, Jesus Christ. How Adam was able to fulfill his telic role before the Fall, however, depended on the matter of his creation, not salvation – therein lies Edwards’ philosophical-theological angle on the necessity of the Fall.

God’s idea of Himself is inextricably bound up in the images represented in the gospel narrative. The problem with Adam’s ‘uprightness’ is that it gives no place for the Divine Being to reveal *fully* Himself in His perfect idea of Himself – as Redeemer. Adam has to fall, according to Edwards, because the God Adam knows is not entirely compatible with God’s idea of Himself. This does not mean that Adam is flawed, but only that an overarching and controlling narrative takes precedence to creation – ‘the great work of redemption.’

Adam, therefore, had a two-fold unparalleled role in God’s creative purposes, subordinated to His redemptive purposes: to actuate the divine presence in temporality in an unrivaled and totally unique fashion; and to plunge humankind into a naturally irretrievable state of lostness, in order to pave way for the Second Man, Jesus Christ, the consummate agent of God’s self-communication and glorification.

With his ontology in place, as well as the working story of ‘God’s electing love and the covenant of redemption’, which Edwards thought was ‘but one work, one design ... to accomplish the glory of the blessed Trinity in an exceeding degree’,<sup>5</sup> the conversation necessarily moves to epistemology: being is about perceiving being, or, more precisely, existence is perceiving because existence is ideal, a mental construct. The conversation about God fashioning mental instances of excellence in order to form an ontological matrix of relational existences (the Divine Being *ad extra*) only goes so far. What God does in terms of ontology necessarily defaults into an epistemological description of the ontic. So, while it remains true that Edwards’ ontology is the foundation of his epistemology, yet his ontology is inextricably epistemological. Which is to say, we cannot speak of man’s existence without speaking of what he perceives and knows. Such is the nature of Edwards’ theory of being.

Since Edwards’ metaphysics of finality suggests that the ‘ends’ appropriate to human nature are built into the very essence that determines human being, and those ‘ends’ have to do with perception, then the reason *why* God created man, indeed, anything at all, ultimately terminates in something epistemological—perceiving ‘Being in general’. Edwards gives this assertion theological expression when he says: ‘Man was made for the reason of religion—this is why God gave this particular formation of dust the power of reason and reflection.’<sup>6</sup>

God prescriptively made man’s mind sensible to ‘Being in general’ two ways: when the mind judges that anything is good or excellent; and when the individual is sensible of good in another sense, ‘when it is so sensible of the beauty and amiableness of the thing, that ’tis

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<sup>5</sup> *Works*9, 118, 125.

<sup>6</sup> Ps. 119:60 (1751).



sensible of pleasure and delight in the presence of the idea of it.’<sup>7</sup> This second sense of good or excellence carries in it an act of the will, or spirit of the mind, as well as the understanding. Thus, the discoveries of God’s excellencies are two ways: by reflection; and immediately by affectional intuition.

It is important to note that, while the soul is one, and the understanding never functions independent of the will nor the will from the understanding, yet there are key epistemological distinctions between them. In ‘M’540, Edwards reminds himself to underscore these distinctions in a future treatise:

Remember when speaking of the creation of man and the state and nature with which he was created, to distinguish between mere speculative and rational understanding and that which it implies—a sense of heart—or [which] arises from it, wherein is exercised not merely the faculty of understanding, but the other faculty of will or inclination or the heart, and to make a distinction between the speculative faculty and the heart. And then to show how many principles of heart God created man with, viz. natural and supernatural principles.<sup>8</sup>

Two sets of things are distinguished. First, Edwards discriminates between ‘mere speculative and rational understanding’ and the ‘sense of the heart’; and, secondly, between the ‘faculties’ themselves. The first distinction is between ‘mere’ propositionally connective or intuitive or *a priori* knowledge<sup>9</sup> and a unique affectional knowing that was not necessarily connected with empirical perception whatsoever. Edwards’ epistemic distinctions, then, prove themselves an analysis of two categories of perception, speculative or notional and sensible or affectional. The latter type of knowledge is not merely confined to one particular kind of the objects of human knowledge, viz. those things that appertain or relate to the will and the affections. Instead, sensible knowledge extends to all the knowledge a person may have of all objects and ideas whatsoever: hence Edwards’ qualifier, ‘and that which it implies ...’, which supports his emphasis upon the integrity of the soul.

The perception of any thing (whether a notional idea or external object) relates to the sensibility of an agent (in terms of good or evil, agreeable or disagreeable, important or otherwise) as an ingredient to individual happiness or misery. Which is to say, all things considered by an agent, intuitively or by reflection, whether notional or sensible, are ultimately a factor in the relation to self, others, and God.<sup>10</sup>

All perceiving, then, is on a conscious level, whether progressively in reflection or, as it were, continuously in perception-existence. But this process of perception-existence, Edwards warns, happens so rapidly and, as it were, continuously (as God communicates each ‘idea of

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<sup>7</sup> ‘M’489, *Works*13, 533. Cf. ‘M’428 and 782.

<sup>8</sup> *Works*18, 164. This distinction plays a critical role in the treatises *OS*, *RA* and *TV*. Interestingly, JE originally wrote the last line thus: ‘love to God and self’; and although the words were changed, from what has been said in Chapter II it is not difficult to see the ontological significance of his replacement.

<sup>9</sup> For JE, such ‘types’ or means of knowledge fall under the category of ‘reason’ or ‘understanding,’ where reason and understanding are at times used interchangeably. See ‘M’1340 (*PJE*, 219).

<sup>10</sup> ‘M’782, *Works*18, 452-66.



existence' in the divine series), that one cannot be engaged in ratiocination each and every moment concerning each and every perception. Edwards wishes to emphasize that, although mental contemplation does not occur for each and every perception, yet the concerted mind consciously relates to all things perceived—including the idea of existence and Being in general—sometimes individually, sometimes as a whole, either approvingly or disapprovingly. This is how God, by a teleological ontic design of human being, guarantees the religious, that is to say, epistemological replication and glorification of Himself.

Edwards' epistemological distinctions have to do with the relational connection of the collective self *with* the object of its perception, whether 'merely speculative' or 'a sense of the heart'. The key issue is what governs perception and consequent adjudications. If the 'natural principles' govern, then the relation to a given object *x* may only be speculative. But if governed by 'supernatural principles', then there is not only access to supernatural objects but also the potential for affectional disposedness toward object *x*. In this sense, 'reflection' or a 'speculative or notional' relation to an object may correspond with the self-love disposition's exercises: the aesthetic relation to the object is prescribed in terms of secondary beauty only. Likewise, the intuitive 'sense of the heart' or 'spiritual sense' corresponds with a disposition of love to God and, therefore, primary beauty. For Edwards, this distinction makes all the difference in the world between '*true religion*' and religion baldly considered:

As religion is the great business, for which we are created, and on which our happiness depends; and as religion consists in an intercourse between ourselves and our Maker; and so has its foundation in God's nature and ours, and in the relation that God and we stand into each other; therefore a true knowledge of both must be needful in order to *true religion*.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, while Adam was governed by the third relational disposition of love to God, i.e. the Holy Spirit, he found his 'happiness' in a 'Being in general' referential existence; all the while, God fulfilled His purposes in that 'happiness'.<sup>12</sup>

But it is not just Adam who is religious; *all persons* are religious persons, regardless of their ontological constitution and self-loving nature. According to Edwards, 'There are no neuters in religion.'<sup>13</sup> When Adam fell, God's purposes were not suspended: Adam and all his fallen posterity, including the most obstinate reprobate, continue to fulfill religious, that is to say, ontologically grounded, epistemological functions. Edwards' philosophical anthropology and theocentric worldview may, therefore, be reproduced in the following system:

Three propositions ... 1. God aims at his own glory in all his works. 2. God has specially made his reasonable creatures for this end. 3. He will obtain this end with respect to all his reasonable [creatures] whether they be his servants or his enemies.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Works I*, 133.

<sup>12</sup> See 1Pet. 3:10-11 (1739/40) and Prov. 19:8 (1749): 'DOC. Self-love duly regulated is a thing of great use in religion.'

<sup>13</sup> Matt. 12:30 (n.d., 1756).

<sup>14</sup> Ezek. 28: 22-26 (1748) published in *Sermon Outlines*, 80-84.



Whether governed by the Holy Spirit or not, all human beings are religious persons who, throughout their lives, fulfill epistemic roles by their being made to perceive inescapably something of ‘Being in general’.<sup>15</sup>

The distinction between ‘true religion’ and ‘common religion’ or, in ethical terms, ‘true virtue’ and ‘common virtue’, is, on the one hand, a mutually consenting relationship between God and man through a supernatural and holy principle of love to God and, on the other hand, non-Holy Spirit originated/generated religious understanding, affections, and consequent practice. In other words, *true* spiritual knowledge is critically dependent upon spiritual union with the source of true virtue. According to Edwards, there can be no view or knowledge that one spiritual being can have of another, except it be immediate and intuitive, or mediate, or by some typological/figurative manifestation or signification. An immediate and intuitive view of any mind, if it is consequent and dependent on the prior existence of what is viewed in that mind, is the very same with consciousness. In Edwards, to have an immediate view of a mind is to have an immediate view of the thoughts, volitions, exercises, and motions of that mind (for this *is* mind). But to have an immediate view of the ideas and exercises of any mind consequent on their existence, is the same as to have an immediate perception or ‘sense or feeling’ of them as they pass or exist in that mind.<sup>16</sup> Again, there is no difference between immediate ‘seeing ideas, and immediate having them’; neither is there any difference between a created mind’s immediate view of the ‘sense or feeling’ of a mind, ‘either of pleasure or pain, and feeling the same.’ ‘Therefore,’ Edwards concludes, ‘a spiritual, created being can’t have an immediate view of another mind without some union of personality.’<sup>17</sup> When God made Adam, Adam both possessed a disposition and perceived God immediately through the union that the Spirit’s indwelling governance affords. But what about the Fall that brought ruinous ontological and epistemological consequences to Adam and his posterity? If God’s religious/epistemological purposes did not cease amidst the atrocity of sin and the dissolution of the spiritual union, then what does the natural-man and reprobate perceive in that connection?

Edwards’ answer comes through this recognition of the mediating factors of reason, nature, society, and history. His is a realistic concept of immediacy in which God enters directly into the sanctified consciousness in, with, and under its total environment. So while perception of God is critically dependent upon spiritual union, yet God has been pleased to mediate Himself to accommodate the creature’s finitude and intellectual inferiority to His infinite and holy Being through time, reflection, communion (in community), and nature.

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<sup>15</sup> Recalling JE’s thesis that man was made for religion (the perception of divine things ‘*M’gg, kk, ll*, etc.) and that his fill formula for this thesis holds that affections are necessary for religion and constitute a large part of its nature (*Works2*, passim).

<sup>16</sup> ‘*M’777, Works18*, 427.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*



Thus it was in the pristine conditions of Eden, thus it is with fallen humanity. Man, regardless of his ontological structure, *is religious* by virtue of his perception of mediated primary beauty in secondary beauty and divine attributes and perfections in reason, nature, society, and history. This synthesis of elements from the ontological and teleological spheres engages both the cognitive power of reflection and empirical perception. While it is Edwards' unique argument for genuine religious experience (and the existence of God), yet it also provides a rationalization for the purpose and value of non-elect persons.

In this chapter I propose to show that the natural-man and reprobate, for Edwards, continue to fulfill an epistemological function in God's program of self-replication and glorification. Moreover, I will argue that this is done within the framework of a *gospel-centered narrative*. That is, I will offer an explanation to Stephen Holmes' concern about Edwards' 'prior failure to let the gospel story inform his position' about the creation and predestination of reprobates. According to Edwards, reprobates are a Trinitarian creation, predestined in Christ, and immediately related to the gospel narrative, not only in this life but in the afterlife as well.

When Edwards gives his chronological account of the history of the work of redemption, his biblical anthropology starts with Adam and Eve. In doing so, he allows his dispositional ontology to inform his rendition of their 'primitive state', which, in turn, advances a dispositional account of the Fall. In both renditions, of man's original status and ominous fall, Edwards offers interesting, inventive, if not internally consistent accounts. How he accounts for man's transition from a state of concreation to fallenness, as well as what the epistemological purpose of 'five-sixths' of the 'heathenish' world might be, can be explained by tracing the logic of Edwardsean dispositions.

### **1. *Man, the Original***

Characteristic of pre-Darwinian creationist accounts of the origin of humanity, the creation of man for Jonathan Edwards was in the strictest sense of the word an instantaneous act of God. He also subscribed to the immutability of species: evolutionary theory being neither a major force in thought, nor in possession of a champion, early in the eighteenth century. Edwards taught that the unity of the race stems from its being descended from a single pair—Adam and Eve. This 'fact,' he thought, was so well established that one need not appeal to divine revelation to ascertain its factuality: one could be convinced of its truthfulness merely through the evidences produced by history, philology, natural science or comparative physiology.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, 'Scripture' Nos. 199, 409, 415, 428, *Works* 15. JE's practice was to copy passages from borrowed books for later purposes. Many of these excerpts and citations concerned archeological or anthropological research that would lend credence to biblical themes, such as the unity of the race.



In distinction from the inferior creatures of the earth, man was created after a divine type. Edwards immediately signals man's highly personal, that is to say, relational nature. Humanity is the act of a Personal Agent who fashions man after His own image and addresses them as covenant participants and agents, like Himself. Unlike any other generated existence, man is commissioned to effect spiritual and moral purposes for God within the created order. Man's origin, nature, and purpose of existence are all intertwined with the Divine Being. Reflecting on this original state, Edwards writes: 'Man was at first created in an innocent, holy, pleasant, and happy state,' and was in his primitive state, 'a noble piece of divine workmanship,' who enjoyed 'a blessed communion with God and there was a free intercourse between God and him.'<sup>19</sup> This was Edwards' conviction in the early years of his Northampton ministry and throughout his life.

In saying these things, Edwards reveals his partisan allegiance regarding the contentious issues of original sin and inherent corruption. These much disputed doctrines, along with original righteousness, total depravity, and irresistible grace, became the focal point of a series of calculated repudiations of established Calvinist orthodoxy from the pens of able eighteenth-century deists and (upstart) Unitarians.<sup>20</sup> Edwards quickly perceived that this was no inconsequential conversation among petty theologians on the periphery of the church; but rather a burgeoning consensus amongst Anglican and Presbyterian clerics (even non-conformist types) piloted by formidable 'Christian humanist' thinkers. Early stages of this theological virus, in the form of Arminianism, had already become epidemic in the Old and New Worlds, or at least Edwards thought so.<sup>21</sup> 'The modern prevailing notions of free-will', however, were merely symptomatic of a deistic plague on the horizon. Those imbued with the ethos and pathos of Enlightenment religion, men such as John Taylor, George Turnbull, and Matthew Tindal, were forging what Edwards believed an unparalleled crisis in Christian history, namely, a universal defection from biblical divinity. Debates over 'enthusiasm' became trifles to him when the foundations of the faith were being compromised. Consequently, around 1748/9, we notice a shift of priorities in Edwards. No longer would his published writings primarily reflect his views on conversion and the outworkings of his own experience of affectional religion. To be sure, they would have a prominent and foundational place in his major treatises. But, now, the burden of the day was the encroachment of 'deistical religion' upon orthodoxy in New England. His priority now was to rectify deism's exalted opinion of man and corresponding depreciation of God's work, presence, and purpose in the world. The situation had only intensified since his collegiate years at Yale.

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<sup>19</sup> 'Scripture' No. 397; *Works*15, 394-95; Acts 16:29-31 (173/4).

<sup>20</sup> Wilber, *A History of Unitarianism*, 2:212ff; Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism*, 5-15, 71-78.

<sup>21</sup> See Goen, 'EI', *Works*4, 76-78.



However, complications arose in the preparations of his projected multi-volume response to ‘modern fashionable divinity’<sup>22</sup> when his church, by one vote, opted to relieve permanently him of his ministerial duties. Inevitable delays followed, as he moved his family to the frontier of Stockbridge, and settled into missionary responsibilities amongst Housatonic and Mohawk Indians. From this outpost, *Freedom of the Will*, *Original Sin*, and *Two Dissertations* were the first fruits of what promised to be a long polemical series against Enlightenment ‘freethinking’.<sup>23</sup> But the core issue in his published responses, as well as anticipated treatises, was the same – the articulation of a universally discernible biblical-anthropology within the framework of a theocentric depiction of reality.

### 1.a. *Original status, original righteousness, and image of God*

The biblical-anthropology debate, which dates back to the controversies between Pelagius, Coelestius, Julian, and Augustine, concerns itself with the issue of whether or not original righteousness (*iustitia originalis*) was an essential property of man’s original constitution. Simply put, the core issue is, ‘In what consists the image of God in which man was created?’ Surrounding issues concern the circumstances in which man was placed and the mutability of his constitution, all which culminate in intensive discussions about the Fall and original sin and, pertinent to our study, larger issues of human worth and purpose within God’s creation.

Pelagians and semi-Pelagians, along with post-Reformation Jesuits, Socinians, and select Remonstrants, deny the Augustinian doctrine of *iustitia originalis* (where original righteousness and holiness are essential to man’s *status integritatis*), asserting in its stead that the first man was created (and all of his posterity thereafter) in a state of pure nature,<sup>24</sup> and that any grace added to man was a post facto *donum superadditum*. The supernatural endowment, superadded to nature, was, of course, to become a peculiarity of Roman Catholic anthropology.<sup>25</sup> By denying a place for original righteousness in the natural or original constitution of man, those who held to a Pelagian or semi-Pelagian theological anthropology made it possible to also reject or modify the Augustinian (and later, Reformed) doctrine of original sin.

The Augustinian/Reformed tradition states that man (biblical Adam) possessed original, or more specifically, ‘native’ righteousness. This state of original righteousness or perfect integrity is sometimes expressed by saying that man was created ‘in the image of God,’ or, in

<sup>22</sup> *Works1*, 430.

<sup>23</sup> JE began compiling several notebooks designated ‘Book of Controversies’ ‘A’, ‘B’, and ‘C’, which target Taylor and other deists with polemical treatises on justification and predestination, faith, perseverance, and efficacious grace, in short, all of the distinguishing tenets of creedal Calvinism. See Holbrook, ‘EI’, *Works3*, 22-23.

<sup>24</sup> ‘In pure naturals’ meaning that man consists of his own parts and essential properties without the gift of original righteousness and without any ‘superadded’ qualities or habits. Hence, it is called a state of pure nature (*‘status purae naturae’*) by a negative and not a positive purity.

<sup>25</sup> See Bellarmino, ‘De gratia primi hominis’ 5 in *Opera Bellarmini*, 4:23f; and Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, 2, cc. 2, 5.



more technical language, that he was concreated. Calvin continued the Augustinian position by affirming the doctrine of the essential righteousness of original man (*Institutes*, I.15.4), as did Beza and Turretin. Reformed theology did not hesitate to say that the image of God in fact constitutes the *essence* of man. Edwards primarily links it to the self-love disposition. The Reformed continued to distinguish, however, between those elements in the image of God which man cannot lose without ceasing to be man, consisting in the essential qualities and powers of the human soul; and those elements which man can lose and still remain man, namely, the good ethical qualities of the soul and its powers. The ‘image of God’ in this restricted sense is identical with what is called original or native righteousness. It is the moral perfection of the image, which could be (and was) lost by sin according to Calvin and the majority of those who side with Calvinism.<sup>26</sup>

The Reformed position can be explained this way: Man’s righteousness consisted in the perfect harmonious concurrence of all the habitual tendencies or inclinations of his soul, and, consequently, of all his volitions prompted thereby, with the decisions of his conscience, which in its turn was correctly directed by God’s holy will. His righteousness was *a natural and entire conformity*, in principle and volition, with God’s law. Adam was possessed of a free will in the sense that in all his responsible, moral acts, his soul was self-determined in its volitions (i.e. he chose according to his own understanding and dispositions, free from any coercion).<sup>27</sup> Just as man’s dispositions decisively incline his will in a state of fallen nature to ungodliness, so then they inclined it to holiness. This inclination was prevalent and complete for the time, yet not immutable, as the event proved. Consequently, the sense in which ‘image of God’ was to be understood was not as an essential, formal and intrinsic participation in the divine nature, but as an analogical, accidental and extrinsic participation (by reason of the effects analogous to the divine perfections which are produced in man) by the Holy Spirit, in accordance with what is the spiritual and moral image of God.

Edwards’ position is only slightly more nuanced. He does not construe anything *of* man’s essential being as originally righteous or holy. That is, what constitutes the entity ‘human being’ does not, as a defining characteristic or element of its essence, necessarily include inherent holiness: ‘Man had not holiness necessarily, as an inseparable qualification of human nature.’<sup>28</sup> A human being is a human being with or without concreated holiness.

This prompts the question: Was original righteousness natural or supernatural? The Reformed state that ‘natural’ has respect to the entire state, necessary to the perfection of the entire nature and pertaining to the ‘native’ gifts of the entire man. Though they allow that

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<sup>26</sup> Calvinist theologian R.L. Dabney (1820-98) dissents from the majority view in his *Systematic Theology*, 295-96), as have many Neo-orthodox Reformed theologians, such as Karl Barth, who emphasized an ‘infinite qualitative distinction’ between God and humanity.

<sup>27</sup> JE uses the word ‘coaction’ to mean (usually) external compulsion (*vid. Works*1, 213).

<sup>28</sup> ‘Born Again’ (c.1730), *Works*17, 205.



original righteousness can be called a ‘grace’ or ‘a gracious gift,’ it is understood in descriptive terms of God’s composing the nature of man. The ‘gift’ itself they do not admit is supernatural, rather it is inherent in man because he was uniquely created like God, by God.

Similarly, Edwards agrees that man is not something less than man if one excludes the notions of the theological and moral soundness of man, or, in other words, his holiness. But he does not agree with Turretin and other Calvinists from the same perspective. First, he cannot separate man’s essential being from the teleological purpose of his existence, religion. Here, ontology is determined by teleology and aesthetic theory. Man is more substantially a spirit because his being is grounded in the extent of his dynamic relations with ‘Being in general’ (man’s theological soundness) and beings (man’s moral soundness). Man’s being may increase through greater consenting relations within the law of the whole. Holiness, in Edwards’ way of thinking, would do just that.<sup>29</sup> But the nature of the first man did not require essential holiness in his faculties to be a natural human being.<sup>30</sup> The same holds true for the fallen posterity of Adam. Natural-men and reprobates are still human beings, but ones whose dynamic potential is not achieved because the expressly revealed purpose of their existence (not the ultimate end, i.e. that glorification of God accomplishes in the destruction of the reprobate) *seemingly* goes unfulfilled. That is, without the fulfillment of theological and moral consenting relations man has less being than otherwise, but is nonetheless man. Hence, Edwards’ histrionic rhetoric: ‘[man] is not himself—not answering the End of his Creation—but contradicting of it.’<sup>31</sup>

As far as concreated original righteousness is concerned, Edwards systematically defends it in *Original Sin*, but its defense is based upon a crucial distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ principles. And it is in ‘supernatural principles’ that he places holiness and original righteousness, thereby rendering it a quality ‘above nature’.

### 1.b. *A Diatribe on Human Nature*

In Edwards’ estimation, the maintenance of the orthodox doctrine of original sin (which rested in an important sense upon the doctrine of concreated righteousness) was part of the first line of defense against the encroachment of ‘unorthodox, rationalistic, and free-thinking’ sentiments of Arminians or worse still, deists, upon the established Calvinistic tradition within the British Isles and the Christian haven of the New World.<sup>32</sup> So central was the verity

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<sup>29</sup> Calvin says something similar in *Institutes*, II.13.4: ‘[Christ] was sanctified by the Spirit that the generation might be pure and undefiled as would have been true before Adam’s fall—i.e. Christ’s holiness is not something natural to an unfallen human nature, but a work of the Spirit.’

<sup>30</sup> *OS, Works3*, 381-82.

<sup>31</sup> Matt. 10:17 (c.1731/2), 5.

<sup>32</sup> JE believed that the heresies of Arminianism and Deism were already in New England, as his private correspondence, sermons, and notebooks reveal. In particular, he was concerned about the influence of John Taylor’s *Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin, Proposed to Free and Candid Examination* (London, 1738). Tagged with the invective, ‘that author who has so corrupted multitudes in New England’, JE



of Adam's Fall and its consequences of original sin and total depravity to the Christian religion in Edwards' mind that, when published contrary notions began to be countenanced in Britain and the Colonies, he immediately began compiling a mass of notes intended to counter their position, and in particular the views contained within Dr. John Taylor's controversial book, *Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin*.<sup>33</sup>

Taylor intended to emancipate humanity from the two elements of original sin, original guilt and original pollution, by reasoning, 'what is natural to us, as the Passions of Hunger and Thirst, or the Frailty of our Bodies, we can by no means help or hinder.' The *Scripture-Doctrine* exemplified a polarized opinion to that of the Augustinians and Calvinists regarding natural-man's responsibility for the dispositions, habits and desires tending to moral judgments and volitions. Representing a Pelagian and semi-Pelagian position, Taylor said that since responsibility cannot be more extended than freedom of the will, no blame (or approbation) can be attached to dispositions, which were held to be involuntary. Thus he judged that nothing done under the auspices of compulsion could be labeled sin or carry the least degree of guilt. Taylor was obviously reacting against the Augustinian assertion that original sin (*peccatum originale*) was a moral punishment for the 'root' sin of Adam. And although Taylor admitted the almost universal presence of sin through his empirical assessment of the world, as well as Scriptural authority, he nonetheless repudiated every notion of total depravity and inherited pollution.<sup>34</sup> Sin, for the rationalist who acknowledged such a thing, consisted of only right and wrong actions of the soul.

For Taylor, then, the equation of biblical-anthropology goes as follows: responsibility and duty must be proportionate to power and ability; and since God states the expectation of duties and also gives powers to men, duty cannot be greater than ability; therefore, the Christian religion consists of our making 'a due use of the powers we already have before we receive and in order to our receiving, further help.'<sup>35</sup> For him, the issue over free will would

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believed Taylor was responsible for attracting the English and New England communions (including his own former Northampton congregation!) to 'new, fashionable, lax schemes of divinity' (*Works*16, 483-84). Cf. Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, 7-29. New Englander and hesitant Calvinist then later liberal, Experience Mayhew, confirmed JE's angst by showing in his work, *Grace Defended* (Boston, 1743), how Taylor's work could be synthesized with New World orthodoxy. Mayhew ceded too much to Taylor's rationalistic and moralistic principles concerning human ability to fulfill conditions to enter in the covenant of grace, viz. faith and repentance. Later in others, such as Charles Chauncy, approvingly appropriated portions of the *Scripture-Doctrine* to their own treatises (e.g. Chauncy's *Mystery Hid from Ages & Generations* [London, 1784] and *Salvation for All Men* [Boston, 1782]) and thereby promulgated its content. This was precisely what JE wished to address and prevent.

<sup>33</sup> Taylor (1694-1761) was an English Nonconformist pastor and theologian. Later in life he made a dramatic move from his early professions of confessional Presbyterianism and doctrinal Calvinism to an anti-Trinitarian and Pelagian position, though he viewed himself more of a 'Christian humanist.'

Holbrook sets up the anthropological crisis very well in his 'EI': The question to be debated: Are men in 'an infinitely miserable condition? And if so, is this low estate brought about by anything except their own individual efforts?' (*Works*3, 7).

<sup>34</sup> *Scripture-Doctrine*, 160, 167-68.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.



be a moot point if the notion of moral necessity excluded the idea of total depravity. In essence, Taylor simply took what the Calvinist asserts as the moral inability of man, and characterized it as mere natural deficiency—God did not provide certain powers, capacities or abilities.<sup>36</sup> Taylor concludes that the naturally deficient agent is not a culpable agent, unless, of course, God is a ‘monster’. Thus, what God requires of man must be within his power. To fulfill the requirements and duties proportionate to divinely allotted *natural* abilities, capacities and powers is the whole of religion, which presumably is rewarded with additional graces, what Taylor calls ‘further help’. Thus, Taylor claims that the doctrine of original righteousness is entirely inconsistent with the nature of virtue and freedom. For if holiness were concreated it would disrupt the liberty, that is, the choice and consent of the moral agent to own it for himself; thereby nullifying the goodness of free-willing virtue.

Edwards believed, in the words of Holbrook, ‘that to follow this line of reasoning was nothing less than disastrous for the gospel scheme’. ‘It will follow on our author’s principles, not only with respect to infants, but even *adult* persons,’ Edwards explains, ‘that redemption is needless, and Christ is dead in vain.’<sup>37</sup> As he wrote in 1752 to his former congregation:

Taylor’s scheme of religion ... utterly explodes the doctrines you have been formerly taught concerning eternal election, conversion, justification; and so, of a natural state of death in sin; and the whole doctrine of original sin, and of the mighty change made in the soul by the redemption of Christ applied to it.<sup>38</sup>

For if, as Taylor taught, men do have a duty to God that they can sufficiently fulfill of themselves and wholly avoid sin, then, as Holbrook states it, ‘Christianity is thrown back into that works righteousness from which Paul and the Reformers had rescued it.’<sup>39</sup>

In this way, Taylor’s opinions were bringing ‘vital religion’ to the brink of an unprecedented crisis, so says Edwards a few weeks later to John Erskine:

I thank you for giving me an account of Mr. Taylor’s writings and the things which he is doing to propagate his opinions. It now appears to be a remarkable time in the Christian world; perhaps such an one as never has been before. Things are going downhill so fast; truth and religion, both of heart and practice, are departing by such swift steps that I think it must needs be, that a crisis is not very far off. And what will then appear, I will not pretend to determine.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Holbrook, ‘EI’, *Works*3, 35-36. William Cunningham describes moral inability, as that ‘which arises solely from want of will to do the thing required, from the opposition of will or want of inclination as the cause or source of the thing required not being done, – there not being in the way any external or natural obstacle of the kind just described’ (*Historical Theology*, 1:600). There is an obvious distinction from external coercion, which the reason and conscience of man recognizes as a different state, which would supersede responsibility. JE essentially forged the usage of the terms ‘moral inability’ and ‘natural inability’ for polemical purposes to express the distinction.

<sup>37</sup> ‘EI’, *Works*3, 35, 356.

<sup>38</sup> *Works*16, 483-84. JE’s letter to his former congregation is appended to *Misrepresentations Corrected*.

<sup>39</sup> ‘EI’, *Works*3, 35.

<sup>40</sup> *Works*16, 490-91. Ola E. Winslow and Holbrook both note that Revd. Samuel Webster’s *A Winter Evening’s Conversation* ‘had managed to bring the controversy to incandescent heat [in New England] by virtually parroting the opinions of Taylor’s *Scripture-Doctrine*’ (‘EI’, *Works*3, 12; Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758*, 307) and therefore may have hastened JE’s response.



Gone, here, is the optimism of *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer, For the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth* (1748). Gone, too, it seems are the preparatory postmillennial expectations for America.<sup>41</sup> It seems the lack of lasting fruit from the Awakenings,<sup>42</sup> the bitter pill of being turned out of his ministerial charge, negative reports about the state of 'true religion' in Scotland, England, and the Netherlands, as well as the proliferation of heterodox, if not heretical, theology throughout former Calvinistic enclaves, left Edwards vexed about the future of Christianity. Instead of irenic appeals for prayer and the propagation of affectional religion, the turn now is to the fundamentals of the faith.<sup>43</sup> Dogma not discourse, polemics not prayers are his weapons in urgent times. The former enemy was skepticism, Arminianism, and to a lesser degree, Romanism: the chore, to discern the 'distinguishing marks' of spiritual religion in the heart, as well as further the demise of the papacy through the reinforcement of Protestant *sola fide*.<sup>44</sup> Now the enemy is, in the words of John Wesley, 'old deism in a new dress': the task for Edwards is to expose it for what it is—'a great evil ... and apostasy'—and eradicate its presence from the halls of faith.<sup>45</sup>

Edwards' first blow came in the form of the magisterial treatise *Freedom of the Will*. The second of his incursions, *Original Sin*, was specifically aimed at Taylor and his ilk,<sup>46</sup> and aimed to prove that evil comes from an evil disposition – governed by the self-love disposition alone.<sup>47</sup> He argues in it, first, that the choosing of a thing is not the origin or source of true virtue, but the antecedent 'good disposition or affection'.<sup>48</sup> He then adds, for a moral agent to be pronounced 'good' while subject to moral obligations to/from God, is the same thing as to be 'perfectly *innocent* ... perfectly *righteous*.' Through an identification of the righteousness of Adam with original innocence rather than with the moral rectitude wrought out by personal endeavors, Edwards recasts Taylor's principal point of contention. According to Holbrook, 'Edwards argued that Adam was immediately capable of behaving as a moral agent under the rule and principle of right action.'<sup>49</sup> Earlier in his *Scripture-Doctrine*

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<sup>41</sup> In a 1743/44 March 5 letter 'To The Reverend William McCulloch', JE expounds his post-millennium views regarding an historical millennium and the events thought to precede it over-against Chauncy's charge of Northampton triumphalism. (See *Works*16, 560) JE believed the Great Awakening revivals were precursors to, but not the start of, the Church's 'latter-day glory', that is, the millennium itself. Gerald McDermott has appropriately designated them 'premillennial revivals' (*One Holy and Happy Society*, 77). Cf. Withrow, 'A Future of Hope', 75-98. JE's public response and disclosure of his millennial position are fully set forth in his *Humble Attempt* (*Works*5, 307-436; see also his 'Notes on the Apocalypse' in *Works*5, 95-297).

<sup>42</sup> See JE's confessions in *DM*, *Works*4, 285; *Works*2, 460; 'M'821, *Works*18, 532.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 106, 131.

<sup>44</sup> Goen, 'EI', *Works*4, 4-18.

<sup>45</sup> Wesley, 'The Doctrine of Original Sin,' *The Works of John Wesley*, 9:211; *Works*3, 298-99.

<sup>46</sup> JE's notebooks reveal that Taylor was to be the target for other polemical responses beyond *OS*.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Works*1, 340.

<sup>48</sup> *Works*3, 225.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.



Taylor charged that ‘Adam could not sin without a sinful inclination’,<sup>50</sup> which thing Edwards also granted, but in turn, used the principle against Taylor by saying, ‘just for the same reason, he could not do right, without an inclination to right action.’<sup>51</sup> In Genesis, Edwards would argue, God pronounced man not just ‘good’ but ‘very good’. ‘For in order to man’s being happy in the blessing [i.e. life in Eden], two things were needful: first, that the enjoyments granted should be good; and second, that the subject should be good, or in a good capacity to receive and enjoy them.’<sup>52</sup> Hence, from the first moment of his existence, Adam possessed an inclination to ‘right action, or, which is the same thing, a virtuous and holy disposition of heart.’<sup>53</sup> By subjecting Taylor’s moralism to the same logical scrutiny employed in *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards was not only able to establish a credible defense of original righteousness, but rest his thesis upon a disposition within man, from the first moment of his existence. In short, Edwards’ position argued that the fall occurred due to a moral necessity, not ‘Hobbesical fatality’<sup>54</sup> or natural necessity. There was no other necessity of sinning but moral. God, then, was to be exonerated from the charge of ‘author of sin’, at least at this level, for creating a ‘very good’ man with an upright disposition of heart (*iustitia habitualis*). That is, God created man with a right principle, toward obedience, to do his duty (*iustitia actualis*). Sin was the moral consequence of an antecedent disposition within man.

However, when the question then turns to the immutability of Adam’s disposition and/or the mutability of his original grace against the background of the Fall, Edwards then seems to say two things. First, he maintains that the immutability of Adam’s essential nature is not to be associated with his holiness or original righteous state.<sup>55</sup> This stays in line with his tradition, but creates an awkward tension in not allowing for a mutable notion of grace. Secondly, he makes certain that the original righteousness of Adam was *supernatural*.

Concerning the first point, Edwards says that Adam’s *status integritatis* consisted of his being created with the *duty* or obligation, maintained by conscience and reason, to be inclined toward full obedience, and not in an immutable disposition itself; though, to be sure, he did possess a righteous disposition toward holiness, but that disposition was ‘above’ his nature. Thus Edwards begins his argument against Taylor’s denial of original righteousness and assertion that man was created *in puris naturalibus*, by contending that Adam was created in a state of moral rectitude and holiness:

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<sup>50</sup> *Scripture-Doctrine*, 442. JE’s paraphrase in *OS* (*Works3*, 228).

<sup>51</sup> *Works3*, 228-29.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Scripture’ No. 398, *Works15*, 395.

<sup>53</sup> *Works3*, 229.

<sup>54</sup> *Works1*, 382.

<sup>55</sup> Gerstner (*Rational Biblical*, 2:303-22), Arthur Crabtree (*Jonathan Edwards’ View of Man*, 21-24), Karl Dieterich Pfisterer (*The Prism of Scripture*, 20-30), and Charles Samuel Storms (*Tragedy in Eden*, 222-23) erroneously interpret JE’s concept of original righteousness as one of fixed moral perfection.



There can be no *medium* between sin and righteousness, or between being right and being wrong, in a moral sense, than there can be a medium between straight and crooked, in a natural sense. Adam was brought into existence capable of acting immediately, as a moral agent; and therefore he was immediately under a rule of right action: he was obliged as soon as he existed, to act right. And if he was obliged to act right as soon as he existed, he was even then *inclined* to act right.<sup>56</sup>

The moral agent, Adam, created as a mature man and immediately capable of moral decisions and actions, was under an obligation to obey a two-fold ‘rule of right action’: (a) the command in Gen. 2:15; and (b) the ‘positive precept’ of 2:17.<sup>57</sup> However, Edwards does not disclose what it is *in* man that inclines him to right action; he simply says that man was thus inclined and that it rendered him perfectly innocent or righteous. The ‘*what*’ is answered through the distinction between the natural and moral image of God, which serve as synonymous terms for *natural* and *supernatural* principles. Edwards explains that just as there are two kinds of attributes or, better, perfections in God—His moral attributes consisting of His holiness (the Spirit), and his natural attributes of knowledge, reason, understanding, strength, etc. (the Son)—so there are in man two kinds of principles. Thus, in a lecture on Gen. 3:24, Adam’s ‘perfect innocence’ and ‘right’ inclinations are better identified with concreation in the traditional terms of *imago Dei*:

The natural image of God that consists in reason and understanding was then complete ... His mind [also] shone with the perfect spiritual image of God, being without any defect in its holiness and righteousness, or any spot or wrinkle to mar its spiritual beauty. God had put his own beauty upon it; it shone with the communication of his glory.<sup>58</sup>

Not only did Adam possess those faculties of understanding and will whereby he resembles the Godhead (the natural image), but also his exercise of these faculties in humble love and obedience was a mirror of the divine glory (the spiritual image). This, of course, is simply a further expression of the structure of the soul corresponding to the Trinitarian model. The natural and spiritual images of God are not mere reflections, but ‘inferior’ and ‘superior’ principles. Of these two kinds of principles, Edwards says in *Original Sin* that,

There was an *inferior* kind, which may be called *natural*, being the principles of mere human nature; such as self-love, with those natural appetites and passions, which belong to the nature of man ... these when alone, and left to themselves, are what the Scriptures sometimes call *flesh*. Besides these, there were *superior* principles that were spiritual, holy and divine, summarily comprehended in divine love; wherein consisted the spiritual image of God, and man’s righteousness and true holiness; which are called in Scripture the *divine nature*.<sup>59</sup>

The spiritual image of God or the ‘superior principles,’ Edwards explains, may be called ‘*supernatural*’ and, therefore, ‘above those principles that are essentially implied in, or

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<sup>56</sup> *Works*3, 228.

<sup>57</sup> ‘M’400, 401, *Works*13, 465-66. This distinction was important in the prevention of being charged with failing to cover the lapse of Adam’s active obedience. Not only did Adam positively sin a sin of commission (willfully eating the fruit), but also negatively through a sin of omission by failing to ‘keep the garden’. JE includes the latter with the former under the rubric of covenant stipulations.

<sup>58</sup> ‘East of Eden’ (1731), *Works*17, 333-34. For JE’s definition of reason, see ‘M’1340, *PJE*, 219.

<sup>59</sup> *Works*3, 381. Cf. Stoddard, *A Treatise Concerning Conversion*, 39.



necessarily resulting from, and inseparably connected with, *mere human nature*.<sup>60</sup> The supernatural, superior principles immediately depend upon ‘man’s union and communion with God, or divine communications and influences of God’s Spirit.’<sup>61</sup> One must not confuse Adam’s essential human constitution with that which is ‘above’ and nonessential to it when considering his inherent spiritual good.<sup>62</sup>

To prevent all cavils ... I here use the words, ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’: not as epithets of distinction between that which is concreated or connate, and that which is extraordinarily introduced afterwards, besides the first state of things, or the order established originally, beginning when man’s nature began; but as distinguishing between what belongs *to*, or flows *from*, that nature which man has, merely *as* man, but a truly *virtuous, holy, and spiritual* man; which, though they began in Adam, as soon as humanity began, yet are not essential to the constitution of it, or necessary to its being: inasmuch as one may have everything needful to his being *man* exclusively of them.<sup>63</sup>

Consequently, in terms of both concept and semantic constraints, what Edwards says about the original righteousness of man sounds surprisingly similar to the Tridentine Roman Catholic position. Just as Rome would say that the first man was made holy *ab initio*, so too Edwards says that Adam was ‘holy’ in a comparable sense. And when Rome would say that original righteousness was not a natural *habitus* of his own will, that is, it did not belong to the nature of man in its integrity but was a supernatural grace, communicated to him temporarily by God, Edwards combines both Reformed and Roman Catholic positions by arguing that man from the first moment of his created existence was indeed inclined toward holiness (the Reformed position), not because it was essential to him, but because the supernatural principle in him inclined him toward holiness (similar to the Roman Catholic position). Edwards explains that this is due to the fact that, ‘God made man at first with two sorts of principles, viz. *natural principles of self-love* and *supernatural principles of love to God*.’ But only the ‘Natural belonged to human nature. [It is] impossible that men should be without them.’<sup>64</sup> In short, the natural principles are of the defining dispositions of human nature, while the supernatural principles are of divine grace.

Thus, when Edwards says of Adam, ‘from the beginning he had a supreme and perfect respect and love to God: and if, so, he was created with such a principle,’ we must understand that the twofold ‘rule of right action’ or ‘duty to God’ was a characteristic of the superior principles; and though they were with him from his inception, they were not essential to him.

Therefore, if any morally right act at all, reflection, consideration, or anything else, was required of Adam immediately, on his first existence, and was performed as required; then he must, the first moment of his existence, have his heart possessed of that principle of divine love; which

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 381-82. Cf. outline of ‘A Rational Account’ (*Works*6, 396).

<sup>61</sup> *Works*3, 382.

<sup>62</sup> See ‘Scripture’ No. 398, *Works*15, 395-96; and Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, 143.

<sup>63</sup> *Works*3, 381 n. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Rom. 3:13-18 (1731/2), second unit, 30.



implies the whole of moral rectitude in every part of it ... which is the thing taught in the doctrine of original righteousness.<sup>65</sup>

In his reply to Taylor, then, we find that the moral or spiritual image of God, the rule of right action, *and* original righteousness all come together in the supernatural, superior principle of divine love. Edwards said as much ten years previous in his treatise on the nature of the affections and their importance in religion.<sup>66</sup> Although in *Religious Affections* he focuses on regenerate and unregenerate souls – a *post-lapsus* subject, yet his statements concerning the principles of holiness, righteousness, love and grace, are completely applicable to the case with Adam: ‘There is no essential difference between that principle of grace which believers have and that original holiness which our first parents and the angels had.’ Adam, then, who was a ‘religious person,’ possessed that principle from which all ‘true religion’ including ‘love of duty to God’ arise, viz. ‘holy love’. Elsewhere he says, ‘I certainly conclude, that virtue and holiness are given by way of immediate emanation from God.’<sup>67</sup>

Significantly, the principle of divine love is not a ‘*what*’ but a ‘*who*’ – the Holy Spirit.

... righteousness, virtue and holiness [are] called grace, not only because ’tis entirely the free gift of God, but because *’tis the Holy Spirit in man*; which, as we have said, is grace or love.<sup>68</sup>

Thus,

Man’s original righteousness consisted in his supernatural principles and in the entire subordination of natural principles to them. [It] did not consist in his natural principles of self-love ... in themselves considered there is no virtue or goodness in them. Considered as subordinate to the supernatural, indeed they are good, but not in themselves. Rather, original righteousness consisted essentially in the other sort of principles. These were the only fount and spring of all man’s righteousness before the Fall.... *Those supernatural principles did not flow from the nature of man but altogether from the Spirit of God.*<sup>69</sup>

Because Edwards identifies the superior principles with the Holy Spirit he never explicitly uses the Scholastic and later Roman Catholic terminology of *donum superadditum* or, as John Gerstner points out, Augustine’s *adiutorium*, but the implications of Edwards’ meaning, nonetheless, are identical: God created man endowed with the Spirit of God, from the first moment of his being, as a vital principle of holiness and righteousness, governing the natural principles of man that summarily consist in a disposition of self-love. Hence, Edwards’ Calvinistic claim, that righteousness is never really inherent to man.

Edwards’ response to Taylor, then, is based upon the thesis that the Holy Spirit is that principle of divine love in man, which, from the beginning, produced or instigated within man a ‘supreme and perfect respect and love to God.’ This holy principle was not only in external duties, but internal duties, such as summarily consist in love. This is because a holy principle

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<sup>65</sup> *Works*3, 230.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Smith, ‘EI’, *Works*2, 36.

<sup>67</sup> ‘M’187, *Works*13, 331.

<sup>68</sup> ‘M’220, *Works*13, 345. Emphasis mine.

<sup>69</sup> Rom. 3:13-18 (1731/2), second unit. Emphasis mine.



is nothing other than an ontological disposition of holiness, or again, God's essential disposition to love Himself reflexively, or again, the Person of the Holy Spirit. So, when Edwards speaks of the principle of divine love as a 'vital' principle in Adam, he is in no way espousing a state of dispositional *equilibrio*. Adam was never in a state of moral limbo or equipoise. Rather, the disposition of holiness in man has its vitality from the first moment of Adam's existence. For, as Edwards writes in 'M'289, 'It's evident that the habit of grace is always begun by an act of grace.'<sup>70</sup> Adam, therefore, could not be said to be in possession of a habit of grace without that grace being exercised immediately to incline him, through the principle's superior governance, in its God-loving tendencies.

Human nature itself, he argues, must be created with some dispositions; otherwise it must be without any such thing as inclination or will. Naturally, the defining disposition within humanity is the disposition of self-love, described earlier as the first determining relation of being. This essential disposition was *from the first* governed by the supernatural principle of divine love, thereby rendering the whole of man an image of God, correctly inclined to holiness. Holiness, Edwards explains, renders all harmonious in the soul, all the powers and relations of being in one consent, so that there is no opposition between one faculty and another.<sup>71</sup> The governance of the Holy Spirit acts through and upon man's natural disposition or consciousness, so that self-love continues in a natural capacity, but is, as it were, extended and rendered excellent through a spiritual and relational union with the Spirit, to the effect that the natural tendencies of self-love are not immediately self-referential, but motivated out of an ultimate and supreme love to God.<sup>72</sup>

By removing grace and righteousness beyond the boundaries of essential or inherent human constitution, Edwards proposed an account of man in his original state possessed of a holy disposition, able to choose with preference things that were most excellent, beautiful, and good, contrary to allegations of Taylor. Thus, if one is to speak of grace with reference to man and true virtue(/religion) in Edwards' system, then one must speak about *divine* grace, that is, one must make reference to the indwelling governance of the Spirit.

When the Calvinist answers that Adam's righteousness was native, that is, it was conferred upon him, as the original *habitus* of his will, by the creative act which made him an intelligent creature, and that the exercise of holy volitions was the natural effect of the principles which God gave him, Edwards demurs. Instead, he holds that God, as it were, set Adam in motion toward righteous behavior and decision-making by the governing and influence of the supernatural principles.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *Works*13, 381.

<sup>71</sup> 'The Pleasantness of Religion' (1723), *Works*14, 107.

<sup>72</sup> *Treatise on Grace*, 67. Similar statements can be found in *OS* (see *Works*3, 278, 279).

<sup>73</sup> Matt. 10:17 (1731/2).



The disposition of love to God, however, is not an active, lawlike tendency in the same way *as* other dispositions. Created dispositions manifest their tendencies when certain conditions are present: on the occasion *c* disposition *D* yields manifestation *m*. The disposition is, as it were, always pressing to yield *m* when *c* because it is created as a lawlike tendency to *m* whenever *c*. But it does not work that way with the disposition of love to God. Why? Because the Holy Spirit is an arbitrary Being, not some impersonal force or prescriptive power, according to Edwards ('*M*' 1263).

When it comes to governing man's essential self-love disposition, the Spirit has relative liberty to function, not according to certain arrangements of circumstances and powers to yield a particular result, but (from a human standpoint) with virtual autonomy. I say 'relative' and 'virtual' because there are two senses in which the Spirit does act in a lawlike way. First, the Spirit, out of ontological necessity, always acts in accord with His nature – holy. Second, the Spirit has covenanted with the Father and Son in a 'holy confederation' to effect certain divinely appointed ends in the 'great work of redemption.' Consequently, we may say that the Spirit functions within man as a governing principle with 'weak arbitrariness' as opposed to the 'strong arbitrariness' of God's essential mental nature. The Spirit directs the self-love disposition by presenting *His good* before the sensible mind, so that the self-love disposition, functioning in its natural capacity, capitulates in *that* good for its own good and thereby achieves some God ordained 'end'. Thus, the manner in which God influences man commits no violence to the will whatsoever. Certainly man is predestined, but God's causal operations do not 'force' his will. Instead, God teleologically wields sovereign control over all of man's affairs by designing the mind to 'will ... as the greatest apparent good is.'<sup>74</sup> When the Spirit internally governs a man, He determines what man actually does by becoming man's reason for it. In short, the governing of the Spirit is simply an override mechanism offering effective motives to a consciousness that is readily sensitive to such divine motions. The fact that the Spirit does not necessarily have to govern each and every instance (i.e. that He is weakly arbitrary in this exercise) becomes of crucial importance in Edwards' treatment of the Fall.

## ***2. The Garden of Glorification***

Creating man in the divine image is the nucleus of God's self-replicating scheme. Man was made to exhibit and reproduce the divine being, not as a replacement or substitute for God but as a divine agency or channel: a mental existence of/from God for/to God. In a word, man displays God's ideal of Himself in visible form. Consequently, the powers that God gives to

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<sup>74</sup> *Works I*, 142. See also Fiering's discussion on divine and human arbitrariness, where he likewise explains that 'Divine operations are themselves "more or less arbitrary"' (*Moral Thought*, 97-103).



man give him the dominion in this ‘lower world’ and make him, as Edwards says, ‘to be God with respect to the rest of creation.’<sup>75</sup>

In the Garden of Eden, then, Edwards’ complex system of idealism and dispositional ontology become concrete and meaningful for both God and man. There, God’s plan in creating the world with respect to redemption is initiated in its external actualization. The end of creation, we recall, is to replicate God’s prior internal actuality *ad extra*. In time and space God’s beautifying disposition ‘enlarges’ through the perceptions of intelligent beings and thereby is ‘greatly glorified’.<sup>76</sup> With respect to the inception of a perceivable world, this process of communicating the idea of a beautiful matrix of existences (God *ad extra*) is initiated with the world-perception of the angels. After all, ‘the end of all created existences’, according to Edwards, is to facilitate mentally the external ‘repetition’ of the divine beautifying disposition.<sup>77</sup> But the angels were only capable of fulfilling this role in a limited sense, for there were a number of things they were incapable of perceiving due to the inferior status of their mental arbitrariness<sup>78</sup> and their station in another dimension of created reality. By their conscious agency the network of existences may be actualized as to secondary beauties and therefore the physical world or the world of senses may be all present at once, but this does not argue that the primary beauty, the beauty between God’s mind and other intelligent perceiving minds’ perception of His excellency mediated through a beautiful matrix and their own divine image, would be manifest. Because God’s beauty is such an arbitrary beauty its communication must be more direct, immediate, and complex: hence the need for the presence of the *imago Dei* in nature in order to actuate the full reality of God’s primary beauty which is only represented in secondary beauties. So while the world may be said to exist upon the perception of a single angel at one point during the creation,<sup>79</sup> yet there would remain a need for intelligent perceiving minds fashioned in His image in *this* realm. This was Adam’s initial epistemological purpose.

Not only is Adam’s God-saturated-reality perception dependent, which, of course, makes it subjectivistic in terms of human experience of time, environment and society, but also it carries with it an in-built epistemological safeguard for objectivity and truth. The truth of reality, that is, ‘proper’ knowledge of what is real in terms of spiritual, moral, and mental existence, depends upon a correspondence between the spiritual reality and a mental receptacle, explained elsewhere as the sharing in God’s objective ideas. ‘Holiness’, for

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<sup>75</sup> Matt. 10:17 (1731/2). Cf. ‘M’383, *Works*13, 451-52.

<sup>76</sup> *EofC*, *Works*8, 435.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 436-39.

<sup>78</sup> In ‘M’1263, JE explains that ‘the higher we ascend in the scale of created existence and the nearer we come to the Creator, the more and more arbitrary we should find the divine operations in the creature’ (*PJE*, 186). Through this argument JE leads his readers to the conclusion that the divine operations in/upon the creature are more arbitrary (less constrained by laws) proportionate to the creature’s likeness to God in terms of arbitrariness.

<sup>79</sup> ‘M’438, *Works*13, 487.



Edwards, functions as the *conditio sine qua non* or link between spiritual reality and spiritual perception. His epistemology, then, is fundamentally theocentric in two ways: God is always the object of all proper knowledge; and all proper knowledge is Spirit dependent.

The concept of holiness is important to Edwards, not only because it provides a key to the resolution of the puzzling issues of his own conversion experience and perception of the world, but also a philosophical-theological answer to his investigations into the end of creation and man's religious role therein. For this reason, we sometimes find holiness presented in his meditations as an abstract, *a priori* concept *and* experience – an *experienced idea*, in effect. As such, it is the dynamic mediator between the Divine Being and earthly being, or between truth and reality. Only that which is mentally holy conforms to the supreme Spirit of God to the end that its perceptions and knowledge of truth are finally consonant and accurate. Adam, then, was imbued with a principle that transfigured both nature and spiritual reality, revealing an ultimate harmony between the spheres of 'religion' and experience. Even while venturing into the abstractions of teleologically loaded epistemology, Edwards does not neglect a more traditionally theological description of this process of God actuating His temporal presence: the Holy Spirit and His epistemic operations are constantly emphasized in his subjective or experiential and thus psychological depiction of reality.

Holiness in man is man's ineffably profound fitness to image forth God's glorious being through everlasting knowledge, joy, and happiness in God. Edwards not only had a different idea as to how the image of God consisted in 'gifts' bestowed upon man at creation, but what the purpose of these gifts were for. Granted, Edwards and his Calvinist predecessors and counterparts employed the same phraseology when speaking about the means and manifestation of God's presence and glorification. But Edwards' vision of the communicative activities of God through that image was much more sophisticated and dynamic. What made Adam unique was the dispositional governance of the Holy Spirit that turned essential dispositions outward to nature, others, and, first and foremostly, God. It was God or, better, the Holiness of God, who extended man's relations to all other things.<sup>80</sup>

The created order, then, also stands as a medium of accommodation for God to communicate Himself intelligibly to the mental capacities of man, to the end that the concreteness of the world conveys, by association, things spiritual, moral, and mental.<sup>81</sup>

By emphasizing the mind's 'seeing' or perceiving a visionary present in terms of such intensity that things are not merely felt and known but experienced as mediatorial relevancies between perceptions in the mind and what exists in the phenomenal universe of God, Edwards clearly presents a world that is, above all, qualitative not quantitative.

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<sup>80</sup> *Works*3, 231. In *OS*, JE explains that Adam, by virtue of the influential governing of the principle of holiness within him, 'chose' and 'regarded' excellence and beauty.

<sup>81</sup> *M*42, *Works*13, 224.



Edwards highly values the mediating position of reason, nature, society, and history. As Elwood explains it, ‘His is a realistic concept of immediacy in which God enters directly into our consciousness “in, with, and under” ... our total environment.’<sup>82</sup> In other words, God has been pleased to mediate Himself to accommodate the creature’s inferiority to His infinite and Holy being through time (to communicate slowly to the creature’s comprehension the ultimately incomprehensible), and reason (that the creature may begin to commune and understand the Creator), and society (which is a model of the relationship between the dependent and serving creature and the Creator), and nature (preparing them to absorb the attributes of God).<sup>83</sup> Whereas earlier Reformed theologians tended to believe that the Bible speaks of man, as a rule, not in his relation to nature, but in his distinction from it, Edwards insisted that although man is conscious of his distinctiveness, he is nonetheless intimately and indispensably related to nature for the existence of both.

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Adam’s knowledge and experience of God, nature, and self-discovery, was not static, but rather a continuous, progressive perception of the spiritual through what could be dubbed ‘ordinary experience’. His conscious existence was an unbroken intuitive response to the reality of God’s communicated presence. Consequently, ‘Adam’s perfection in holiness did not render utterly impossible that he should love God more’.<sup>84</sup>

As Adam’s knowledge and experience of God progressed through perceiving primary beauty in himself and nature, so, too, God’s excellencies were replicated in greater degrees.<sup>85</sup> The body was (is) instrumental in this process because through it man perceives certain divine perfections, thus providing a means by which rational reflection and passional affections may take place and be intensified. In Edwards, affections and passions are well expressed through the body. Thus, the body itself is ‘fittingly’ capable of denoting those dispositions of mind, which, he says, ‘exceedingly readily will appear in their bodies, the bodies being more easily and naturally susceptible and manifestive of the affections and dispositions of the mind.’<sup>86</sup>

So, while man’s dispositional holiness provides an intellectual view by which God is seen, that is, the soul by virtue of its union has in itself those powers whereby it is capable of apprehending spiritual objects without looking through the windows of the outward senses, yet those outward senses are vital for providing a living encounter with the Eternal Presence that confronts man along the entire range of spatiotemporal living.

Thus, through the interrelatedness and connectedness of all things, to one degree or another, the self-communication/expansion/glorification of God extends to the whole of creation. Since the whole of the created order is an expression and replication of the inner

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<sup>82</sup> Elwood, *PTJE*, 24.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> ‘M’894 [TS Beinecke].

<sup>85</sup> ‘M’662, *Works* 18, 200.

<sup>86</sup> ‘M’174, 149, *Works* 13, 325, 301.



actuality of God's fullness, God's relation is excellent. As a result, the idea of the interrelatedness of the whole of the cosmic order or network of existences links non-sentient entities, simple equalities, intelligent perceiving beings, and, of course, primary beauty, in the process of divine self-communication, expansion, and glorification.<sup>87</sup>

Man's individuality is experienced not in terms of actual independence of being, but in terms of self-consciousness in organic relatedness. Man alone, of all creation, is equipped to participate directly and consciously in his environment. Animals participate indirectly and impersonally, that is, without the conscious experience of self and relation to other selves; they are not 'religious'. Man, however, lives in conscious encounter with his environment aware that the world he perceives is a world replete with the spiritual and moral reality of God. This encounter must continue forever if it is to be meaningful to God and man. Edwards' doctrine of immortality is, therefore, principally associated with the *purpose* of existence, not the incorruptible substance of the soul. The soul is immortal for the simple reason that God's ideal purposes concerning the soul are eternal.<sup>88</sup> The way of telic-ontology to the knowledge of God is superior to the way of cosmology and aetiology: hence Edwards' man-made-for-religion thesis. Adam was gifted with 'the strength and comprehension of mind sufficient to have a clear idea of general and universal being, or, which is the same thing, of the infinite, eternal, most perfect divine Nature and Essence', for the express purpose of mentally replicating the 'divine Nature and Essence.'<sup>89</sup> Adam initiated this process at the highest level when he was the agent of divine glorification in the Garden of Eden; but just as the angels could not fulfill certain conditions to replicate God equivalent to His arbitrariness, so too Adam, in his concreated state, could not replicate God in His perfect image of Himself as Savior and Redeemer. Something redeemable was needed: a fall from grace was in order.

### ***3. The First Sin: A Dispositional Account of the Fall***

'Tis easy to observe that wisdom of God, that seeing He designed [man] for such a height of glory, that it should be so ordered that he should be brought to it from the lowest depths of wretchedness and vileness.<sup>90</sup>

Here we have one of Edwards' theodicies for the Fall and presence of evil in God's universe. It argues in terms of comparative appreciation for blessedness from the perspective of man.

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<sup>87</sup> 'M'547, *Works*18, 93-95. Cf. *Works*8, 532. Lee explores the possibilities of God's self-enlargement through the natural order in 'Edwards on God and Nature' in *Edwards in Our Time*, 15-44.

<sup>88</sup> 'M'1006 [TS Beinecke]. JE reminds his readers that God could, if He so pleased, extinguish all created existences. God is under 'no obligations' to created beings, and created beings cannot persevere without the continued exercise of divine power (*Banner-Works*, 2:4-5). This is to omit the intra-Trinitarian covenantal obligations within the divine confederation concerning redemption.

<sup>89</sup> *Works*1, 182.

<sup>90</sup> 'M'571, *Works*18, 110.



But this theodicy, like others that pertain to maximal good,<sup>91</sup> is ‘ordered’ by two laws (recognized by many Edwards commentators) operating in Edwards’ system.

1. The ‘principle of subordination and dependence’ or ‘derivativeness’ that runs through all nature and grace. This law is a necessary element in Edwards’ conception of God’s primordial and structured decision to ‘enlarge’ Himself in an ‘orderly’ way.
2. The ‘law of progression’, in which there is a methodological movement to God’s linear ordering and completion of the redemption scheme, and by which lower ends are typical of the higher, and introductory to them.

Principle ‘1’ orders the theological hierarchy of God’s thematic decrees. The eternal *pactum salutis* possesses, as its substance, a ‘confederation’ among the members of the Triune Godhead that the Father would ‘accomplish the glory of the blessed Trinity in an exceeding degree’ by ‘repeating’ the Divine Being’s perfect image of Himself through a scheme of redemption. All other regulative decrees, such as providence and creation, are subordinate and derivative of this ‘covenant of redemption [which] never had a beginning.’<sup>92</sup> The redemption scheme ‘confederated upon’ yields other subordinate thematic decrees, namely providence and, subordinate to providence, creation.<sup>93</sup>

Principle ‘2’ chiefly pertains to the *ordo salutis* and *historia salutis* agreeable to the controlling *pactum*. The ‘law of progression’ offers a logical and specific ordering of the details that subsist within the larger thematic decrees. If God is to get His glory through a redemption narrative, then something will be put into a redeemable position. That ‘something’ is man. The *ordo salutis* spells out the logical issue and execution of the divine decrees within the overarching scheme of redemption. The historical ordering and unfolding of the decrees are in themselves traceable revelatory items.

Edwards tempers what otherwise would be hyper-supralapsarianism (where the decrees of redemption and a fallen subject precede creation) by adopting early in his theological career Peter van Mastricht’s mediating position on predestination. Stephen Holmes succinctly states Edwards’ position:

God’s decision that some creatures should share His love is dependent only on God’s ultimate end ... described as ‘glorifying his love and communicating his goodness’. The decree that this should

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<sup>91</sup> In several places JE essentially repeats the central thesis of Leibniz’ *Essays in Theodicy* (1710), namely, that the existence of evil is a necessary condition of the existence of the greatest moral good. JE also argued in his ‘M’ and sermons that Adam also had an imperfect knowledge of evil. According to JE, experiential knowledge of evil prior to the encounter at the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is ruled out by virtue of the account of the Fall. In this theodicy, the ‘lively perception of good’ properly depends on the knowledge of its contrary evil, that ‘there was much attained of new knowledge of good, as there was knowledge of evil; and this was the end of it principally, the knowledge of good’ (‘M’ 172).

<sup>92</sup> *Works* 9, 119.

<sup>93</sup> ‘M’ 993 [TS Beinecke].



happen through God being merciful to undeserving creatures, by contrast, is logically dependent on the Fall. The fact of election is decreed *supra lapsus*; the form of election *infra lapsus*.<sup>94</sup>

So, then, man is created for the glory of God, because man is a proper means of it. Edwards wants to say with his Dutch and Genevan counterparts that everything else that God decrees concerning man is in intention *after* this end, 'because they are all a means of it.'

The logic stands clear enough, but sin and evil are no less vital to God's act of self-glorification. In Edwards' aesthetic ontology, 'irregularities' are necessary for an infinitely excellent being; complex beauty requires it. Theologically and morally, this translates into the involvement of fallen intelligent beings. In Edwards' mind, God not only *wants* the fall, but also (in both an ontological and epistemological sense) *requires* it. He does not stop short of actually saying it: a fall is necessary for a redemption scheme; it is necessary for *bona fide* replication of the divine perfections:

There are many of the divine attributes that, if God had not created the world, never would have had any exercise: the power of God, the wisdom and prudence and contrivance of God, and the goodness and mercy and grace of God, and the justice of God.<sup>95</sup>

'Tis necessary that God's awful majesty, his authority and dreadful greatness, justice and holiness should be manifested. But this could not be unless sin and punishment had been decreed ... The shining forth of God's glory would be very imperfect ... without them.<sup>96</sup>

God desires and requires a fall because Adam neither needed nor could appreciate the full revelation of God. If no fall, then no redemptive nature meaningfully replicated, no divine exercise in effulgence, no spouse for Christ, and so on. Man, for Edwards, was intended to perceive the excellencies of God through Jesus Christ; this was the end of religion and therefore the end of the creation. It takes a redemption scheme that presupposes an object of redemption to perceive the attributes of mercy, grace, and justice, to name a few. Ultimately, then, Edwards is uncompromisingly supralapsarian. Holmes has it right where he says, 'Regardless of the place of the decree of reprobation [or the fall], God's first thought is emphatically that He will redeem, not that He will create.'<sup>97</sup>

### 3.a. *A New Approach to an Old Problem*

Since fallenness indispensably serves God's glory and was eternally decreed, temporally orchestrated and unalterably brought about by Him, Edwards' typical theodicies, in which he states that God is 'under no obligation in justice to determine that man surely shall not fall' because 'tis much better that the determination should be left to the good pleasure of an

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<sup>94</sup> *God of Grace*, 129. See 'M'292 (*Works*13, 383-84) where JE admits his reliance upon Mastricht and Turretin on matters of predestination, and cites Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica*, Lib. III, cap.2; and Turretin, 'De prædestinatione', *Institutio* 2:376-86.

<sup>95</sup> 'M'553, *Works*18, 97.

<sup>96</sup> 'M'348, *Works*13, 419-20.

<sup>97</sup> *God of Grace*, 131.



infinitely wise being, than to blind causes', become red herring defenses about arbitrariness.<sup>98</sup> The real issue for Edwards concerns the vindication of God from the usual charge of 'the author of sin' from the likes of Taylor, by accounting for the 'spontaneous' rise of a sinful inclination in Adam. Fully conscious that the plausibility of both his disputation with Taylor and aesthetic/telic-oriented vision of reality rests in no small part on an internally consistent and adequate account of the Fall, Edwards gives considerable attention to the issue.<sup>99</sup>

He typically begins his discussion, as he does in the following excerpt, assuming the covenantal (federal) framework conveyed by Calvin and the Westminster divine and announcing human culpability: 'The act of our first father in eating the forbidden fruit was a very heinous act'; which, in turn, either precedes or trails an intimation of God's exculpation through the doctrine of concreation. 'Eating the fruit' encapsulates all that entails Adam's first sin, an act that rendered himself and all of his posterity 'odious and abominable to God'.<sup>100</sup> Whether the fruit was real or merely figurative is uncertain: Edwards speaks baldly of 'the fruit of the tree'. Either way, the *real* sin occurred before the action, specifically in Adam having 'a mind to be like God' and 'imagining' that 'knowing good and evil ... would be a great exaltation of [his] nature.' The volitional act was simply the outward product of an inward occurrence. The responsibility, guilt, and cause of the sin wholly lay in Adam. Of course, the problem with exonerating God from charges of creating an automaton or having any such causal influence on man begs the question, 'What occurred in Adam?'

This question historically has been Augustinian theology's *onus probandi*: 'How could a being created with *originalis iustitiae* and inclined solely to holiness, will to do evil?' Edwards himself invites the same scrutiny when he says in the midst of one sentence: 'This is doubtless true: for although there was no natural sinful inclination in Adam, yet an inclination to that sin of eating the forbidden fruit, was begotten in him'.<sup>101</sup> Clyde Holbrook reiterates the problem as it relates to Edwards:

Once having established Adam's original righteousness, how could he explain the take-over of the lower faculties? The withdrawal of the supernatural principles *followed and did not precede or cause* the fall itself. Whence then arose Adam's inclination to sin, since, by Edwards' own oft-repeated thesis, a cause must be found for every act?<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> 'M'490, *Works*13, 534.

<sup>99</sup> Dozens of sermons offer substantial discussions on the Fall, with no less than nine expounding it as the main doctrine. JE also lists fifteen entries under the heading of the 'Fall' in his 'Table to the Miscellanies'. At least as many entries intimately relate to the Fall or discuss it in corollaries, as do the 'Book of Controversies', *OS*, *FW*, and *RA*.

<sup>100</sup> Gen. 3:11 (1738/9), 5; 'East of Eden', *Works*17, 336.

<sup>101</sup> *Works*3, 228-29, n. 6.

<sup>102</sup> Holbrook, 'EI', *Works*3, 51. Emphasis added.



Holbrook goes on to describe Edwards' attempted solution to Adam's first sin as 'nothing more than circular reasoning' and 'inconsistent'.<sup>103</sup> Is Edwards' defense of original sin in *Original Sin* just another exercise in the long list of failed attempts to reconcile this paradox?

In a recent article, Prof. John Kearney examines Edwards' account of Adam's first sin and judges it 'coherent and adequate'.<sup>104</sup> Opposing Holbrook, Storms, Gerstner, Crabtree, Sam Logan, Jr., and an unnamed consensus of Edwards commentators, Kearney offers from Edwards a three-part solution to the problem of Adam's fall, consisting of: (1) a distinction between 'sufficient' and 'efficacious' grace; (2) the 'perversion' of Adam's rational will; and (3) Adam's imperfection as a creature.<sup>105</sup> Kearney asserts that the combination of these three conditions not only supply a rational account of the fall, but vindicate God from the usual charge as the author of sin.<sup>106</sup>

Though Kearney's final conclusion may be correct, his approach should be rejected. Kearney pursues a resolution of Edwards' position through a faulty analysis of 'sufficient' and 'efficacious' grace, which, in the end, contradicts his thesis.<sup>107</sup> The internal coherence of Edwards' account of the Fall results from following the logic of his dispositional ontology, not a distinction between 'sufficient' and 'efficacious' grace.

Confusion over Edwards' position begins with his statements in 'M'290, where he says:

If it be inquired how man came to sin, seeing he had no sinful inclinations in him, except God took away his grace from him that he had been wont to give him and so let him fall, I answer there was no need of that; there was no need of taking away any that had been given him, but he sinned under that temptation because God did not give him more.<sup>108</sup>

Although a sufficient *cause* for the Fall is not addressed in this quote, differentiated graces are spoken of by Edwards, the grace Adam possessed while he was 'perfectly innocent,' which was his 'original righteousness', and grace withheld from him, i.e. 'confirming grace, that grace which is given now in heaven, such grace as shall fit the soul to surmount every temptation'.<sup>109</sup> But the effectualness of grace applied—whether sufficient or efficacious—is a moot point; that is *not* the issue in the Fall; the government of the indwelling Spirit is.

By distinguishing between applications of grace rather than kinds, two problems could be addressed: (1) the familiar charge by Arminians, Socinians, Taylor, etc., against the Calvinists' logic, which, they believed, led to 'God as the author of sin'; and (2) introducing sin without retreating from the insistence of original righteousness. Edwards addresses these problems by first critiquing his tradition from within. He does not believe the question, 'How

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid. He finishes his analysis by saying, 'Edwards ended lamely' (52).

<sup>104</sup> Kearney, 'Jonathan Edwards' Account of Adam's First Sin', 127-41.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>106</sup> He defends the latter point in his article, 'Jonathan Edwards and the "Author of Sin" Charge', 10-16.

<sup>107</sup> See to this thesis Appendix B: 'Sufficient and Efficacious Grace'.

<sup>108</sup> *Works* 13, 382.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.



could a being created with original righteousness and inclined solely to holiness, will to do evil?’ is the right question. ‘Original righteousness’ is neither a sole inclination to righteousness nor God ‘pointing Adam in the right direction’ (Kearney’s claim). Rather, it is Adam’s possession of a disposition of love to God and holiness.<sup>110</sup>

His sole natural inclination was toward himself: the essential exercising of the self-love disposition, per the specification of his telic-oriented essential constitution. The Holy Spirit governing the natural principle of self-love by a superior principle of God-relatedness made man originally righteous, holy, and perfect. Consequently, the questions for Edwards were: (1) In what fashion did the Holy Spirit govern Adam; and (2) What were the circumstances that attributed to the cause of the first sin?

Concerning the first question, Anri Morimoto wishes to say that a gracious disposition in man functions with nomological necessity when certain conditions are fulfilled. That is, the principle of grace (i.e. the Spirit) acts in an identifiable lawlike fashion in accord with prescriptive rules and is, therefore, scrutable under cause and effect analysis. But Edwards nowhere says this. Instead, the Spirit acts with unpredictable arbitrariness; save upon the instance of infusion. So while the nature of a disposition effects its enactment upon initial possession, that is, ‘a habit [or disposition] of grace ... is always begun with an act of grace that shall imply faith in it, because a habit can be of no manner of use till there is occasion to assert it’,<sup>111</sup> yet the Spirit may suspend His governing influence without rendering original righteousness void. Though this may seem unfair, for Edwards it is really a matter of perspective: the Spirit may justly withhold or remove His grace from the impeccable because the retention of man’s original status is an inferior and subordinate ‘end’ to God’s principal ‘ends’ in redemption. The standing and falling of man is simply a means to something more important to the will of God.<sup>112</sup>

A consequence of the supernatural operation of the superior principle is that it immediately depends upon ‘*man’s union and communion with God, or divine communica-*

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<sup>110</sup> This is where Kearney’s analysis falters: he equates original righteousness with what he understands to be JE’s two-fold definition or usage of sufficient grace: (1) that Adam was created with an inclination to ‘right action’ (a bias toward good); and (2) that Adam was originally a free agent with respect to his ‘whole will’ and his ‘rational will’ (‘Adam’s First Sin’, 128, 131). The issue of ‘actual grace’ is, however, entirely omitted by Kearney, as if JE were silent on the point. By not equating sufficient grace and original righteousness with actual grace or the indwelling governance of the Holy Spirit, Kearney completely misconstrues the crux of JE’s theodicy. So instead of adequately investigating JE’s statements on grace outside of *OS*, Kearney forges ahead to subsume the superior principles (which Kearney inadequately defines as ‘a “sense” of duty to God and love of duty to God’) within his two-fold definition of sufficient grace (136). The problem for Kearney remains the same as the Augustinian tradition – Adam’s “sense” of duty ... and love of duty to God’ are withdrawn *after* the fall: for how else could Adam be, as JE would say, ‘wholly given to wickedness’? If Adam retained anything of the sufficient grace which Kearney has all but naturalized, then one could argue that JE permitted a place for works righteousness—a thing totally repugnant to his soteriological thought.

<sup>111</sup> *M* 241, *Works* 13, 358. See also Chapter V, §1.c.

<sup>112</sup> See *HWR* and *EofC*.



tions and influences of God's Spirit.'<sup>113</sup> Thus, in order to maintain a declaration of 'perfect innocence or righteousness', Edwards must say that 'from the beginning he [Adam] had a supreme and perfect respect and love to God: and if so, he was created with such a principle.'<sup>114</sup> From the first, then, the Spirit governed Adam's conscious existence, that is, his self-love disposition. This governing was a gracious governing, sufficient to prevent the Fall when exercised by the Holy Spirit. But Edwards unequivocally asserts that God neither was obligated to govern constantly nor was it His intention to do so. God may suspend the governance of the Spirit without compromising Adam's *status integritatis* or abrogating His justice, which thing He did during or just prior to the provocation.

According to Edwards, God's purpose in suspending the governance of the Spirit was to test Adam during his probationary period: hence the meaningfulness of the divine injunction, promise, and cautionary. If God were not addressing Adam as on trial, the admonition of death would be an idle threat. God, however, tested man to see if Adam would under specific circumstances adjudicate rightly and exercise his self-love disposition in accord with Being in general. This is what Edwards means by 'sufficient' grace – that 'Adam had sufficient assistance of God *always present with him* to have enabled him to obey if he had used his natural abilities in endeavoring it'.<sup>115</sup> Edwards chooses his words quite intentionally, 'it was *present* with him'; he does not say that it was actively and, therefore, efficaciously governing him at that precise moment.

When the Spirit withdraws or suspends His governing powers He disengages His dispositional influence over the 'less noble principles', identified by Edwards in *Religious Affections* as 'passions' – those inclinations whose 'effect on the animal spirits are more violent; and in them the mind is overpowered and 'less in command.'<sup>116</sup> The superior principles are present, but not active. Under such circumstances the self-love disposition and the disposition of love to God are 'entirely distinct and don't enter one into the nature of the other at all.'<sup>117</sup> Adam, for all intents and purposes, was left on the occasion of the provocation to adjudicate the situation according to 'the extraordinary freedom' that he possessed.<sup>118</sup>

The discussion on Adam's freedom in 'M' 501 and 436 becomes crucially important now that the Spirit has been subtracted from the equation. In 501 Edwards writes:

Man might be deceived, so that he should not be disposed to use his endeavors to persevere; but if he did use his endeavors, there was a sufficient assistance always with him to enable him to persevere. See No. 436.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>113</sup> *Works*3, 381-82. Italics added.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>115</sup> Rom. 5:6 (1735).

<sup>116</sup> *Works*2, 98. JE exercises pains to distinguish passions from affections – they are not identical.

<sup>117</sup> 'M' 530, *Works*18, 134. Miller notes that this analysis of a privative cause of sin mirrors that of Thomas Aquinas (*Jonathan Edwards*, 276-77).

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Works*18, 51.



Setting aside ‘sufficient grace’, Edwards presents a man with natural abilities or ‘endeavors’, which, if fully utilized, would preserve man through most, but not all, circumstances. Man’s ‘endeavors’ are explained in ‘M’436 in terms of the freedom he possessed prior to the Fall. There Edwards begins by saying that upright Adam possessed a freedom of will different than fallen Adam. Since the Fall man has, as it were, a bifurcated will, ‘a will against a will.’ He describes these ‘two wills’ as the *rational will* and the *appetite*, together forming ‘the whole will’. The rational will is man’s ‘rational judgment of what is best for him’. Its functioning falls within the boundaries of reasoning, the utilization of logic and judicious principles to discern what is best for him. The other will or inclination arises from the ‘liveliness and intenseness of the idea, or sensibleness of the good of the object presented to the mind, which we may call appetite.’<sup>120</sup> This will of appetite is against or contrary to the ‘reason and judgment of the rational will’ and ‘begets a contrary inclination’. In fallen man and natural-men the appetite has overthrown the rational will and keeps it subjection.

So that although man with respect to his whole will, compounded of these two (either arising from the addition of them together when they concur, or the excess of one above the other when they are opposite), is always a free agent; yet with respect to his rational will, or that part of his inclination which arises from a mere rational judgment of what is best for himself, he is not a free agent, but is enslaved; he is a servant of sin.<sup>121</sup>

The case with Adam’s original state, however, was altogether different, at least up to the point of his first sin. His rational will was not subjugated to the inclination of appetite. Instead, the appetite worked in conjunction, harmony, and acquiescence to the rational will. The rational will was free in just the same manner as the ‘whole will’. Sufficient grace simply *rendered* man a free agent, not only with respect to his whole will, but his rational will, or ‘the will that arose from a rational judgment of what was indeed best for himself.’<sup>122</sup> It was not the freedom itself, merely the ordering of the appetite so that the rational will, whether governed by the third disposition or not, could will with strength above and beyond the appetite. He could arbitrate more dispassionately. He had a certain *enkrateia* – strength of will, continence, self-control; what Edwards calls ‘primitive strength’.<sup>123</sup>

The pieces are now in place to give account of the *cause* of the sinful act that Holbrook seeks. Edwards knows that whatever the *causa efficiens* might be, it cannot be spontaneously generated: to argue for a spontaneous free choice would, of course, undermine his magisterial work *Freedom of the Will*, and play right into the hands of the Arminians. According to Edwards, the cause was always there – it is the self-love disposition: the motive was *in* Adam – not outside of him. Again, disposition decides the matter concerning morality and human behavior; indeed, it ‘causes’ the effect of morality. There are, however, several contributing

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<sup>120</sup> *Works* 13, 484.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 484-85.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Rom. 5:6 (1735).



factors, all of which pivot on the possibility of ‘the whole will’ freely arbitrating. On this critical point, Edwards seems to have imbibed Malebranche’s thesis from the 1680 *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, concerning the suspension or subjugation of the appetite to rational arbitration.

In a discussion on whether sufficient grace and efficacious grace are intrinsically the same, Malebranche said that actual grace, like other motives, is *not* invincible or efficacious by itself with respect to consent to the inclination efficaciously induced in the will.<sup>124</sup> Though Edwards, of course, could not agree (because, for him, such grace, which is both united to the soul *and* assertive, actually exemplifies invincibility – the logic of superior dispositions, as well as the principle of subordination, control the outcome), yet he was attracted to the idea which supports it, namely, that whether, on a given occasion, specific actual grace will turn out to be efficacious with respect to a given agent’s consent or merely sufficient (and, hence, not efficacious) depends upon free choices of the agent in question in the circumstances then current. Thus, while on the one hand, Malebranche held that God’s total causal contribution to creation up to and including the instant at which a free creaturely choice occurs – a consent or non-consent to a volition – is metaphysically and physically consistent with the non-occurrence of that choice; Edwards, on the other hand, redefined Malebranche’s ‘sufficient grace’ as ‘suspended grace’, thereby removing it from the equation, and then spoke of transient circumstantial causes as the *causa deficiens* contributing to the *causa efficiens* of the whole will, which is primarily moved by the rational will. It seems as if Malebranche may have supplied the basic ideas concerning ‘perfect freedom’, the suspension of consent, and gracious motives, but Edwards recast the whole in a dispositional mold.

Thinking in terms of neatly defined dispositions, some natural, some supernatural, Edwards strictly links the possibility of passional willing ‘primary beauty’ with the *active* governing of the disposition of love to God.

I say, this must be meant by his having sufficient grace, viz. that he had grace sufficient to render him a free agent, not only with respect to [his] whole will, but with respect to his rational, or the will that arose from a rational judgment of what was indeed best for himself.<sup>125</sup>

When Edwards says, ‘his judgment of what is best for himself,’ he does not mean Adam’s judgment of what is best ‘absolutely’. As he explains, the mind’s sense of the ‘absolute loveliness’ (or, in his aesthetic terminology – primary beauty) of a thing directly influences only the will of appetite. Which is to say, only a disposition of love to God may directly influence the will of appetite in cases of absolute loveliness or primary beauty. This is significant because only the primary beauty of a thing can draw the appetite. Thus, the self-love disposition does not and cannot be drawn to primary beauty unless actively governed by

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<sup>124</sup> Malebranche, *Oeuvres complètes*, 7:353-56.

<sup>125</sup> ‘M’436, *Works* 13, 485.



that which gives direct access to it. The agent, operating on the basis of a free rational will, may only have primary beauty *indirectly influence* it, as the judgment may be convinced that ‘what is most lovely in itself will be best for him and most for his happiness.’ Rationally judging that a thing is ‘lovely in itself’, devoid of an affectional sensibleness of its primary beauty, according to Edwards, ‘signifies nothing towards influencing the will, except it be in this way, that he thinks it will therefore be best some way or other for himself’. According to Edwards’ logic of dispositions, if an agent (Adam) merely rationally adjudicates that a thing is ‘lovely’, but does not have a sensibleness of its primary beauty, and simultaneously does not believe it absolutely best for himself (that is, the primary beauty of it is not invincible), then ‘he will never choose it’; though if he is sensible of the primary beauty of it ‘to a strong degree’, he may will it, ‘though he thinks ’tis not [absolutely] best for himself.’ Perhaps consciously following the logic Malebranche offers in *Méditations chrétiennes et métaphysiques*, Edwards then concludes:

Hence it follows that a person, with respect to his rational will, may be perfectly free and yet may refuse that which he at the same time rationally judges to be in itself most lovely and becoming, and will that which he rationally knows to be hateful.

Therefore man, having that sufficient grace as to render him quite free with respect to his rational will (or his will arising from mere judgment of what was best for himself) could not fall without having that judgment deceived, and being made to think that to be best for himself which was not so, and so having his rational will perverted.<sup>126</sup>

The test implied that man was able to withstand certain temptations: Adam would have adjudicated rightly in most circumstances. However, by what Edwards describes as an ‘extraordinary manifestation of God’s sovereignty’, there was at least one circumstance in which Adam would not choose correctly, viz. circumstances in which his mind was deceived. The goal ‘to be as God’ was deemed rationally good; the ‘whole will’ was taken up in the natural movement of the self-love disposition; man did not employ his ‘endeavors’, i.e. appetite, leaving him to willfully but wrongfully choose that deemed best for himself under those unwieldy circumstances.

God ... might so order [man’s] circumstances, that from these circumstances, together with his withholding further assistance and divine influence, his sin would infallibly follow....<sup>127</sup>

So, on the one hand, man with the Spirit was *non posse peccare*, and on the other hand, under divinely orchestrated ‘infallible’ circumstances, in which the Spirit’s governance was temporarily suspended, he was only *posse peccare*. Man, under those circumstances, was only acting according to how God had made him, and when he sinned, Edwards insists, only he was culpable. Do suspending sufficient grace, withholding confirming grace, giving man a relatively unstable constitution, and providentially fixing ‘coincidental circumstances’ which

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid. Cf. Malebranche, *Oeuvres complètes*, 10:66.

<sup>127</sup> *Works* I, 413.



triggered the fall make God culpable to the charge of ‘author of sin’? Edwards says, absolutely not. Man choosing out of the rational exercises of the self-love disposition is not a divinely implanted seminal principle of contrary inclination (Augustine’s *rationes seminales*). Neither does Adam’s mutability reflect upon the creator: it is simply a *condito sine qua non* of finite existence (per Augustine). Moreover, Adam’s failing deliberation is an instance of deception, a ‘perversion’ of the will, not incontinence. But, like the following excerpt from *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards is willing to indicate a ‘yes’ to *causa deficiens*:

Therefore I sometimes use the word ‘cause,’ in this inquiry, to signify any antecedent, either natural or moral, positive or negative, on which an event, either a thing, or the manner and circumstances of a thing, so depends, that it is the ground and reason, either in whole or part, why it is, rather than not; or why it is, rather than otherwise; or, in other words, any antecedent with which a consequent event is so connected, that it truly belongs to the reason why the proposition which affirms that event, is true; whether it has any positive influence or not.<sup>128</sup>

One may question whether the comprehensiveness of this definition makes the deficient, as well as the efficient, true causality. In the end, Edwards’ privative or negative cause with relation to God seems to fall into the categories of Leibniz’ principle of sufficient reason, and, consequently, evokes the conclusion of necessity and, therefore, true and sufficient causality.<sup>129</sup> Certainly if Edwards was emphasizing anything, it was not Taylor’s contention that our original parents sinned in the same manner that all men do, by errors of judgment made in ignorance of consequences and with free exercise of choice. Rather, he admitted and emphasized the more difficult conclusion that God created man—not sin—fully knowing that the telic-orientation of man, if left ungoverned under providentially orchestrated circumstances, would certainly result in a fall. Consider the following concession of Edwards:

Whether God has decreed all things that ever came to pas or not, all that own the being of God own that he knows all things beforehand. Now, it is self-evident, that if he knows all things beforehand, he either doth approve of them, or he doth not approve of them; that is, he is willing they should be, or he is not willing they should be. But to will that they should be, is to decree them.<sup>130</sup>

Divine intentionality rises to the forefront: God wills the decree of the fall of Adam, according to Edwards; indeed, ‘God decrees all things, even all sins.’ And Edwards goes further, *because* God had sufficient reason(s) for it.<sup>131</sup> As he said in his ‘Observations on the

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 180-81.

<sup>129</sup> See Alexander, (Ed.) *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, 16. Simply, the Principle of Sufficient Reason states that ‘nothing is without a reason’ (or ‘cause’ or ‘because’). In the words of Leibniz: ‘nothing happens without a reason why it should be so, rather than other wise’ (ibid.) For JE, the ‘because’ is God’s overarching plan of self-glorification via redemption. See also James Dana’s criticism of JE’s necessitarian and deterministic conclusions in *An Examination of the Late Reverend President Edwards’s ‘Enquiry on Freedom of the Will’* (Boston, 1770), 59ff.

<sup>130</sup> *Banner-Works*2, 525 §1.

<sup>131</sup> James Dana saw this and made an able attack on JE’s distinction between permissiveness and efficient causation (*Examination of the Late Revelation’dive President Edwards’ Enquiry on Freedom of the Will* [New Haven, 1773], 59-65).



Divine Decrees: ‘nothing can come to pass but what is the will and pleasure of God should come to pass.’<sup>132</sup> Though scandalous to moderate Calvinists, yet Edwards had no misgivings teaching this because it was part of his worldview.

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After an undisclosed time of probationary trial in the garden of Eden, man, if he remained steadfast, was to be ‘confirmed’, and would have been put beyond all possibility of lapsing through an endowment of efficacious or confirming grace.<sup>133</sup> Man’s immutability, however, would not have been self-produced nor could it have been self-sustained. According to Edwards, sinning for man was ‘Not beyond a natural possibility—no creature ever was or ever will be naturally impeccable or naturally incapable of sinning.’ If man is prevented from sinning and dying, God would have to engage actively and continuously the soul, ‘as we have all reason now to conclude that it is with the [holy] angels.’<sup>134</sup> For Edwards, God determines the ultimate standing or falling of man. The *pactum salutis* guarantees a redeemable subject; the decree and orchestration of the Fall provides necessary subject material.

While sin’s origin may be privative in character, the cause of sin abides as a real dispositional principle in man. In a figure from the ‘Book of Controversies’, Edwards encapsulates his whole dispositional theory on the fall and sin’s derivation in a scale model:

If there be weight in opposite scales the balance may be kept even but if the weight of one scale be removed the other will have the entire government and will put the balance out of order without an addition.<sup>135</sup>

As Holbrook points out, the important phrase here is ‘without any addition’; sin is not a positive entity. However, the cause of sin is a positive entity. The law or principle that offsets the scale is the self-love disposition; it *causes* the other side of the scale to drop, and with it, Adam and all his posterity into a morass of sin. As unpleasant and repugnant as it may have appeared to Edwards’ eighteenth-century audience, he nonetheless believed it truth from God that was logically demonstrable to all who would consider it in light of Scripture and reason.

The reception and evaluation of Edwards’ ‘defense’ were mixed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By the twentieth century, however, his efforts to reconcile the problems of the Fall had become anachronistic. Perry Miller, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Clyde Holbrook, for example, while commending instances of philosophical originality within *Original Sin*, either completely dismiss or denounce Edwards’ account of the Fall as antiquated ‘circular reasoning’.<sup>136</sup> However, viewing Edwards’ treatment in the dispositional terms he originally

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<sup>132</sup> *Worcester-Works* 5, 357, 378.

<sup>133</sup> ‘Scripture’ No. 51, *Works* 15, 65.

<sup>134</sup> ‘East of Eden’ (1731), *Works* 17, 335.

<sup>135</sup> Cited by Holbrook, ‘EI’, *Works* 3, 50.

<sup>136</sup> Miller instead that *OS* was ‘a strictly empirical investigation, an introduction, in the manner of Bayle and Newton, of a law for phenomena’ (*Jonathan Edwards*, 267). Though it is true, as Holbrook points out that ‘Edwards drew upon human experience in a broad sense’ and that it was equally true



intended yields a surprisingly consistent, even conceivably adequate account – nothing short of a monumental achievement for his theological tradition. If the later eighteenth or early nineteenth century had produced a study substantiating the coherence and sufficiency of his dispositional treatment in detail, then perhaps the sophistication, innovativeness, and importance of *Original Sin* would have received recognition comparable to *Freedom of the Will*. But it was not to be: neither New England's mood concerning its forlorn subject matter, nor Edwards' weighty presentation offered much of a future for *Original Sin*.

The failure of his eighteenth-century audience and later commentators to pick up on the real issue of dispositions largely rendered his efforts against Taylor fruitless. Notwithstanding this historic failure, Edwards' treatment of the Fall was a central and foundational issue for his system and worldview: it provided a rationale for what God both desired and required for His proper self-glorification, viz. (fallen) agents with epistemic abilities to perceive and replicate attributes that, 'never would have had any exercise' if it were not for them.<sup>137</sup>

### 3.b. *A Species of Sinners*

Immediately upon our first parents eating the forbidden [fruit], God took away His Holy Spirit from him, which left him destitute of original righteousness and all that moral excellency of mind which before he was endowed with, and left him under the dominion of sin.<sup>138</sup>

Man's ontological deprivation means that, aesthetically, he has become a comparative 'deformity', an 'irregularity'. Fallen man is not only without superior principles to govern his natural principles, but the natural principles themselves are 'injured'. Man becomes the embodiment of depravity or 'the greatest and only evil' by virtue of his exclusive disposedness toward self-being. Though a natural and defining disposition, the truncated scope of the exercise and sensitivity of a self-loving disposition renders it unharmonious, asymmetrical, and disagreeable with the law of the whole. Human depravity, then, is being exactly the opposite of a 'Being in general' minded spirit.<sup>139</sup> It is the governing of the total self by inordinate self-love.

Edwards' dispositional ontology makes it easy for him to distinguish between the destruction of man's *essentia* and the loss of a non-essential disposition. Consequently, the death that sin brought was not so much dehumanizing as it was anti-relational. This is the legacy that Adam left to his posterity, since they not only were constituted in him and share in the first sin as their own, but also because he federally represented them.<sup>140</sup> The effect of the

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'that much of the evidence he offered in support of the doctrine of man's actual evil was drawn from Scripture' (*Works*3, 'EI', 27), yet I submit that the philosophical foundation behind at least the first prong of his forked doctrine of original sin (viz. the depravity of the human heart and the imputation of Adam's first sin to his posterity) was based on his dispositional conception of human ontology.

<sup>137</sup> 'M'553, *Works*18, 97. Cf. 'M'348 and 407, *Works*13, 419-20, 469.

<sup>138</sup> 'East of Eden', *Works*17, 333.

<sup>139</sup> 'The Mind' 1, *Works*6, 338. Cf. Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 61-62.

<sup>140</sup> *Works*3, 404-12. On p. 247, JE calls Adam 'the public head and representative of his posterity.'



sin—of original sin and Adam’s first sin—consists chiefly in their being born without the third relational disposition. Which is to say, what is inherited by Adam’s posterity is the same dispositional constitution of post-lapsis Adam.<sup>141</sup> The resulting implications are manifold: spiritual and physical death; bondage to sin; no access to primary beauty; etc. And since each soul is an immediate creation of God,<sup>142</sup> God cannot be faulted with creating a sinful being: He simply (and justly) creates a soul with only that which is essential to ‘human being’. This is why Edwards insists that infants are morally neutral, not corrupt. But without the superior governing principle to regulate their self-love disposition, they begin to sin ‘as soon as they are capable of it.’<sup>143</sup> That is, with the first motion of their minds, they exercise a restrictively self-referential disposition. This natural but now inordinate (sinful) disposition is invincible and voluntary (since a movement of the will); persisting while the person persists.

So while Adam may have had strength of character and will, it is not the natural-man who is weak-willed; rather, he is in naturally irremediable bondage. The atrocity of sin, then, was not only that it vitiated Adam’s entire being but that it was an inescapable self-loving energy that could not be conquered by ordinary means. Herein is the tragedy of human existence apart from actual grace: natural-man suffers profound epistemological consequences on account of the fall and does not sensibly perceive his spiritual plight. Man simply continues to will and desire in a sinful manner irrespective of the fact that he can do nothing in his own strength to alter his condition.<sup>144</sup> For the elect, however, Edwards’ soteriological answer to *The Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of the Will* is *God Glorified in Man’s Dependence*: God breaks through the epistemic darkness with ‘A Divine and Supernatural Light immediately imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God.’<sup>145</sup>

For the reprobate, however, there is no supernatural light, no glorious Redeemer to administer grace, no answer to their human condition. Reprobate natural-men remain in

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<sup>141</sup> As Holbrook points out in his ‘EI’ to *OS*, it is important to note that there is not, according to JE, a universal identity between Adam and his posterity. JE maintains the Anselmian and Thomist distinction between ‘nature’ and ‘person’. Men as persons or individuals are not identical with Adam. What is passed on is a ‘nature’ corrupted by Adam. Here the dispositional element of JE’s account of the Fall stands prominent.

<sup>142</sup> ‘M’ 541, *Works* 18, 89.

<sup>143</sup> *Works* 1, 134; cf. *Works* 3, 134-38. Catherine Brekus calls this state “non-innocent” rather than inherently depraved.’ She continues by adding, ‘But because of Edwards’ deep sense of human frailty, he insisted that children committed their first sin almost immediately after birth. Tragically, their “non-innocence” was so brief that [it] was virtually meaningless. As he explained, the “time of freedom from sin be so small” that it was “not worthy of notice”’ (Brekus, ‘Suffer the Little Children’, 7; *Works* 1, 134-35). Still, JE openly calls this condition a guilty condition, though to obtain it one must have participated in the first sin (*Works* 3, 135-36 n.2). JE comes clean on the implications later in *OS* when he says ‘that infants are not to be looked upon by God as sinless, but that they are by nature children of wrath’ (215) and, as Scripture indicates, are justly exposed to divine punishment.

<sup>144</sup> For JE, it is the born-again Christian who suffers from *akrasia*. Akrotic action is a fact of life for the elect in this world, as they wrestle with the existing *simil iustus ac peccator*. Their incontinence is exhibited primarily in intentional behavior that conflicts with their own divinely illumined values.

<sup>145</sup> (1734), *Banner-Works*, 2:12.



darkness because they have no knowledge or perception, experience or direct consciousness, of primary beauty or spiritual excellencies.<sup>146</sup>

Edwards articulates a scenario in which reprobates, with only two dispositions and no direct access to the spiritual dimension of reality, serve an ontological function in the replication of God's maximal complex beauty. Ever mindful of his idealist teleological axiom, that the *purpose* of being is to be perceived, Edwards offers a view of world reality in which the reprobate natural-man perceives things which pertain to God's attributes and being, as well as the matrix of existence, so that God gets His glory from their terrestrial existence.

#### ***4. The Reprobate's Window on the World***

In 'M'777, Edwards divides humanity into two classes of perceiving existence: those spiritual beings that have direct access to spiritual knowledge; and those natural beings who do not. What separates the two is an ontological union with the source of spiritual knowledge – 'the Spirit of Christ.' According to Edwards, when man sinned, 'God the Father would have no more to do with man immediately ... He would henceforth have no concern with man but only through a mediator, either in teaching men or in governing or bestowing any benefits on them.'<sup>147</sup> The relational principle at work here says that a created being cannot have an immediate view of another mind without some union of personality. Therefore, no creature can thus have an immediate sight of God or true knowledge of spiritual realities, but only through the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Mutual consenting relations are the key to perceiving and understanding the theology of nature and types in natural phenomena and history.<sup>148</sup>

In saying this, Edwards opens the door for certain knowledge of God to be ever available for the natural-man and those left permanently in that condition, the reprobate. He calls the kind of knowledge they may have 'common illumination', a general revelation of the internal sort, whereby one may be innately conscious of the deity through natural sensibilities and conscience. However, it operates in conjunction with general revelation of the external sort, viz. the phenomenal world and history. The two forms of general revelation emerge out of Edwards' single vision of a purposeful Trinitarian creation: the world is a divine idea intended to communicate God's perfections (Son and Spirit); it is, as it were, a mechanism of interface between the Divine Ideal and man's perception-existence. Which is to say, the world itself is a mediator of sorts, saturated with theological and moral meaning (*vid.* Chapter V, §4). To be sure, a soteriological chasm is fixed: 'Natural-man may have convictions from the Spirit of

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<sup>146</sup> 'M'239, *Works*13, 354-55. *Works*2, *passim*.

<sup>147</sup> *Works*9, 131.

<sup>148</sup> JE sees types, not grounded in prophetic nature, but in a certain metaphysical relation to its antitype. (Hence, relations are what establish types as such.) Hence their continued and sustained presence in the world after the great christic event.



God, but 'tis from the Spirit of God only as assisting natural principles, and not infusing any new and supernatural principle.'<sup>149</sup> Yet, notwithstanding this qualification pertaining to special grace, the natural principles of the reprobate do perceive/receive knowledge in the same way as all other creatures in heaven and earth, namely, by means or manifestations or signifiers originating in God and mediated through Jesus Christ:

Jesus Christ, who alone sees immediately, [is] the grand medium of the knowledge of all other things; they know no otherwise than by the exhibitions held forth in and by him....<sup>150</sup>

Thus, whatever reprobates *do* perceive is necessarily something God mediates by Jesus Christ through His Spirit in 'manifestations' or 'signs held forth'.

Of these signs, Edwards identifies in 'M'777 four sorts 'by which anything that is another spiritual being can be manifested, or made known':

- (1) Images or resemblances;
- (2) Words or declarations, or voluntary significations, either inward or outward, equivalent to speaking;
- (3) Effects; and
- (4) A priori.<sup>151</sup>

In addition, there are two ways of understanding and thinking about the things received by reflection or consciousness: by mere cognition, an indirect view of the things themselves in signs, which is a 'kind of mental reading, wherein we don't look on the things themselves (i.e. by the actual presence of their ideas or sensation of their resemblances); and, secondly, apprehension, 'wherein the mind has a direct *ideal view* or *contemplation* of the thing thought of.'<sup>152</sup> Translated into the accessible language of his treatises, the former is that understanding which consists in 'mere SPECULATION or the understanding of the head', and the latter, the SENSE OF THE HEART.'<sup>153</sup> The reprobate have full and unmitigated access to the former which, due to the interpenetrating nature of the faculties, generates a certain sense of the heart concomitant to perceived/received, indirect ideas about God.

If Edwards were asked, what precisely do the reprobate perceive about God, he would reply, extraordinary and common perceptions. Extraordinary perceptions are always associated with gospel 'seasons of grace';<sup>154</sup> they are religious and internal, intended either to prepare divinely a sinner for salvation or 'harden his heart' and thereby confirm his just damnation and ultimate reprobation. This is a Spirit-induced 'conviction of the truth, and what is called the knowledge of the truth, viz. the truth of the things of revealed religion'; the

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<sup>149</sup> 'M'626, *Works*18, 155.

<sup>150</sup> 'M'777, *Works*18, 428.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 428-31.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 428.

<sup>153</sup> 'M' 782, *Works*18, 458-59.

<sup>154</sup> 'Living Unconverted Under an Eminent Means of Grace' (1729), *Works*, 14, 359-370.



highest kind of inward motions ‘that ever the natural-man have.’<sup>155</sup> However, when the Spirit ‘assists’ the natural principles, He does not give glimpses into the excellency of Christ, for in Edwards’ celebrated analysis of religious affections, whether in the treatise bearing that name or *Distinguishing Marks* or *Faithful Narrative* or *Some Thoughts*, sensing the ‘excellency of Christ’ functions as *the* distinguishing characteristic of those who have saving union with Christ; it is the encounter with God that converts the soul, whereby ‘The whole soul ... doth in a lively manner accord and consent to it, and cleave to it.’<sup>156</sup> Reprobates never experience this kind of affectional, faith initiating illumination. In Edwards, the reprobate’s inability to sense the ‘reality’ of divine things constitutes the damnable noetic gap between natural-men and spiritual men. Because spiritual excellencies (moral/mental union between minds) ‘don’t seem real to ’em’, their only knowledge of religious truth concerns a conviction of evil, as the Holy Ghost acts upon them merely as ‘an external occasional agent.’<sup>157</sup> This may be two ways: a conviction of the judgment by reason that evinces the truth of the things of religion, that respects natural good; and a sense of heart of natural good. God assists these principles in common illumination,<sup>158</sup> but always within the context of conviction of sin.

In distinction from the extraordinary, there are common perceptions: ‘the manifestations [God] makes of himself in the works of creation and providence, and in his providential dealings with them, preserving them, bestowing good things on them, and correcting them for their sins ...’.<sup>159</sup> This is general revelation externally considered, and wherein the reprobate’s primary contribution to the replication of God *in this world* commonly consists.

Recalling Edwards’ maxim, ‘Man was made for the purpose of religion’, common perceptions qualify as religious ends, though for the reprobate they have no salvific benefit, only enough general revelation to ‘render them inexcusable.’<sup>160</sup> The natural-man ‘commonly perceives’ in universal phenomena God’s ‘power and wisdom’. Which is to say, the world communicates God’s intellectual superiority and supreme power:

But the greatness of vast expanse, immense distance, prodigious bulk and rapid motion, is but a little, trivial and childish greatness in comparison of the noble, refined, exalted, divine, spiritual greatness. Yea, these are but the shadow of greatness and are worthless, *except as they conduce to true and real greatness and excellency, and manifest the power and wisdom of God.*<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> ‘M’ 782, *Works18*, 458-59.

<sup>156</sup> ‘The Threefold World of the Holy Ghost’ (1729), *Works14*, 409; cf. ‘The Excellencies of Jesus Christ’ (1736), *Banner-Works*, 1:680-89. *Distinguishing Marks* (1741) and *Faithful Narrative* (1738) are reproduced in *Works4*.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. ‘Natural men think they believe that Christ is savior, etc. They hear a great deal about it, and ... they don’t deny the force of the arguments. Yet for all that, it don’t seem real to them.’ Cf. ‘Warnings of Future Punishment Don’t Seem Real to the Wicked’ (1727) in *Works14*, 200-12.

<sup>158</sup> ‘True Grace Distinguished from the Experience of Devils’ (1752), *Banner-Works*, 2:46-47.

<sup>159</sup> ‘M’ 706, *Works18*, 324.

<sup>160</sup> ‘The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners’ (n.d.), *Banner-Works*, 1:668-79; Deut. 29:4 (1745): ‘DOC. Persons are not at all excused for any moral defect or corruption that is in them.’

<sup>161</sup> ‘M’ 42, *Works13*, 224. Emphasis added.



Spiritual man may perceive ‘true and real greatness and excellency’ (primary beauty), while the natural-man perceives ‘the power and wisdom of God’ that is intrinsic in the medium of creation. But the world of secondary beauties only conveys the moral, mental, and spiritual, even redemption-related (though not redeeming) qualities inherent in nature—per Edwards’ panentheism—as ‘types’, ‘shadows’, and ‘images of divine things’ because the world and all of its phenomenological occurrences (to which their epistemic abilities are limited) are not the deity in its most ‘direct existence’. In virtue of this common perception, man voluntarily subdues it to itself *and* necessarily must submit himself in every circumstance of life. This is part of that relation to God-through-the-world (indirect consent to ‘Being in general’) that expresses itself otherwise in the consciousness of existence and freedom and responsibility;<sup>162</sup> in other words, the consciousness of being susceptible, subject and dependent, not merely to natural, but to ethical and divine law, and, ultimately, the Divine Lawgiver.<sup>163</sup>

If the world is a communication from God about God, then Edwards’ typological system is its hermeneutic. Though Edwards expected ‘ridicule and contempt’ for employing and extending typology beyond Scripture into literally every aspect of the human experience—relationships, nature, history, concepts—he knew that the sophistication of his worldview went beyond (in the words of Stephen R. Holmes) ‘just another pre-Enlightenment attempt to discover some form of general revelation’; it was thoroughly integrated within his philosophical-theology, for his panentheism made types in history and nature inevitable.<sup>164</sup>

The world of types, then, is an inescapable part of God’s pastoral conversation, a sometimes verbal and, in this case, sometimes non-verbal, communication between the Creator and minds created in His image. Likewise, the creature’s understanding of God’s pastoral conversation is verbal and non-verbal, Scriptural and phenomenological. For

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<sup>162</sup> See Fiering, *Moral Thought*, c. 2, ‘The Moral Achievements of “Natural Understanding”’, esp. pp. 62-82, where he treats the subjects of ‘Synteresis’, ‘God’s Retribution’, ‘Conscience and Symmetry’ and ‘Beauty’, with regard to the natural-man.

<sup>163</sup> For a detailed study on the connection between natural law/revelation and typology in JE’s thought see, Cooley-Nichols, ‘Nature as Divine Communication in the Works of Jonathan Edwards’, cc. 3, 4.

<sup>164</sup> *Works* 11, 152; Holmes, *God of Glory*, 105. Traditionally, typology involved the exercise of matching biblical types—prophetic figures, events, or circumstances—in the OT with their antitypes of fulfilling figures, events, or circumstances in the NT. To be sure, New England Puritans had a typological tradition of their own. Their warrant for interpreting the Bible typologically did not so much come from Calvin, who approved of typological and allegorical interpretations (*Institutes*, II.11.4), as from the Apostle Paul in Romans 5:14. The dissenting Puritan tradition, however, regulated prophetic or typological interpretations as well as allegorical interpretations of certain texts, by giving prominence to a literal and historical interpretation of the whole of Scripture. Well-known New England advocates of ‘the plain style’ were John Cotton, Thomas Shepherd, and Thomas Hooker (see Davis, ‘The Traditions of Puritan Typology’, 37f). Their kind of typological prefiguration and fulfillment, though at times extraordinarily imaginative, never eclipsed the boundaries of the Bible’s internal regulative hermeneutic. But where JE departed from their hermeneutical tradition and aligned himself with more innovative exegetes (such as Increase and Cotton Mather) was in his application of biblical typological principles to nature and history. He continually pushed beyond conventional parameters and applied his philosophy of typology to contemporary historical events and natural phenomena. For an excellent analysis of JE’s typological writings, from which much of the above details were extracted, see Anderson, Lowance and Watters, ‘EI’, *Works* 11, 3-48.



spiritually responsive persons moments of spiritual sensitivity/enlightenment are *given* by divine orchestration and communication through the Spirit. They cannot be artificially conjured up: God is glorified not by partial, but total dependence – even with respect to saints.

The redeemed have the potential advantage of refining, as it were, their skills of perception. Mundane experiences, if coupled with the ordinary means by which God works—the Word of God—can (with the aid of the Holy Spirit) transform a routine occurrence into an encounter with God. The non-verbal language of God, if it is ever to be meaningful, must be deciphered by the verbal language of God, Jesus Christ inscripturated and incarnated.<sup>165</sup>

But since in Edwards' predestinarian soteriology God is neither the Father nor Shepherd of the reprobate, it would be better to speak of God's typological communication as 'the language of God'.<sup>166</sup> It is a language with which God never ceases to communicate and man never ceases to perceive in terms of two things, secondary beauties and certain attributes.

Since the reprobates' diminished ontological structure and consequent epistemic restrictions mean that the perception of 'true and real greatness and excellency' or primary beauty (as it thematically pertains to redemption-accomplished-and-applied replication) belong only to the regenerate elect, reprobates are left to perceive and replicate (1) secondary beauties, (2) those attributes which all 'commonly perceive' – power, wisdom, and justice, and (3) those attributes that 'never would have had any exercise', but which do not pertain to redemption-accomplished-and-applied replication, viz. perfect hatred and wrathful power.<sup>167</sup>

Natural-men approach very near to the spiritual consent of minds when they apply their remarkable natural abilities in works of art, philosophy, literature, architecture, mathematics, physical science, and other 'noble pursuits', though primary beauty is never properly obtained. Moreover, Edwards would say that the natural-man himself and in his relations, family, society, and environment, is an analogy, type, shadow, and image of primary beauty.

Along with regenerate persons, natural-men also perceive God's power, wisdom, and justice in typologically associated 'manifestations and signs', temporal relations and occurrences. But, unlike regenerate persons, natural-men alone replicate the punitive dimensions of God – those attributes which must receive full exercise and for which Christ's propitiatory and atoning work was designedly inoperative. So while it is true that Jesus Christ experienced punitive and retributive divine exercises, even to an infinite degree, yet it was only for His 'elect church' and with an element of hope and promises of vindication and victory.<sup>168</sup> In a sense, Christ perfectly replicates the redemptive aspect of God's punishment/abandonment of human beings – but *only for the elect*. For His act of replication entails crucifixion *and* resurrection, punishment-cum-justification: it is the good news of God's

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<sup>165</sup> 'M' 108, *Works* 13, 279.

<sup>166</sup> Knight, 'Learning the Language of God', 531-51.

<sup>167</sup> *Charity*, *Works* 8: 'In hell God manifests his being and perfections only in hatred and wrath' (390).

<sup>168</sup> 'Christ's Agony' (1739/57), *Banner-Works*, 2:871.



wrath placated for all who believe and are ‘born-again’. But in Edwards’ thinking, for God’s attributes of hatred, righteous indignation, and wrathful power to have perfect exercise, they must be *perpetually perceived and eternal in duration and exercise*.<sup>169</sup> Christ’s substitutionary suffering was neither eternal in duration nor representative of God’s personal infinite hatred:

Christ had not to consider that God hated him ... God withdrew his comfortable presence from Christ, and hid his face from him, and so poured out his wrath upon him ... but yet he knew at the same time that God did not hate him, but infinitely loved him.... Christ’s sufferings lasted but a few hours, and there was an eternal end to them, and eternal glory succeeded.<sup>170</sup>

Universalism, therefore, is an impossibility – God must have some intelligent perceiving being(s) perpetuate the replication of His hatred, wrath, and retribution. Recalling Edwards’ thesis that man was made for (the perception of) religion, and that the full formula of this thesis holds that affections are necessary for religion and constitute a large part of it nature. If all were made born-again Christians by the effect of Christ’s sacrifice, then certain attributes would cease to be (‘M’662). It was ‘fitting’, therefore, that God should not only let man fall and bring his fallen posterity into the world, but allow at least some of them (in Edwards’ view, most) to continue thus throughout their terrestrial lives, even into eternity, that God may exercise and replicate Himself in their minds, to His *eternal* glory.<sup>171</sup>

#### **4.a. *An Eternity of Hell Torments***

The sermon doctrine for 1Cor. 11:32, ‘Tis a dreadful thing but yet a common thing for persons to go to hell,’ reveals both Edwards’ personal conviction of the dreadfulness of the subject and his professional conviction that it is the pastor-scholar’s duty to study and impart ‘the whole counsel of God’, and human reality in light of it, as a manifestation of God’s glory. The interpretative framework for Scripture and reality is, of course, the drama of redemption history. The drama, Edwards tells us, has two culminative points: the episode concerning the Messiah’s birth through His ascension; and the consummation of the age in the last judgment, etc. The first has been achieved, the world now moves toward the penultimate end. But it is not just the world that advances; heaven and hell mirror the progression on earth.

After the first rash of awakenings in 1734/5 (dutifully recounted in *Faithful Narrative*), Edwards began contemplating the relation of the outbreaks within the larger scheme of God’s great work of redemption. He figured that these revivals, indeed, even the Great Awakening of 1740-43, merely precipitated a glorious millennial era in the near future. God was noticeably advancing His kingdom, and Edwards, through a number of publications, would do

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<sup>169</sup> ‘The Eternity of Hell Torments’ (1739), *Banner-Works*, 2:83-89. See also ‘M’1348 and 1356 [TS Beinecke].

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 872. Cf. Zech. 11:8 (1703/1): ‘DOC. There is a mutual loathing and abhorrence between God and wicked men.’

<sup>171</sup> *Charity, Works*8: ‘Hell is ... a world prepared for the expressions of God’s wrath’ (390).



what he could to underscore the moment's urgency and fragility, as well as notify, steady, and hasten ministers in their revival responsibilities. His thoughts are collected under the 'Miscellanies' rubric 'WORK OF REDEMPTION', which reaches its greatest concentration of entries in 1739, the year he preached the thirty-sermon series posthumously published as, *A History of the Work of Redemption* (1774).

But his interest in a chronology of redemption was neither romantic nor simply historical. Rather, it was fundamentally apologetical. True enough, Edwards began his theological career endeavoring to provide a systematic 'Rational Account of Christianity, or The Perfect Harmony between the Doctrines of the Christian Religion and Human Reason.' But on the eve of the Great Awakening he abandoned this project to take up one based upon biblical prophecy and the history of the world 'both sacred and profane.'<sup>172</sup>

Casting theology in a historic mold harmonized well with his teleological methodology already in place. God's 'ends' are 'ends' because there is a linear development to His plans and activities, at least when considered *sub specie aeternitatis*. His principles of subordination and progression always said this, but now they, not rationalism, are the featured method. Thus, any advancement in redemption history refers to both the visible and invisible realms.

The driving force behind the alteration in his thinking is radical theocentrism; the mechanism that makes historical progression meaningful and coherent in both realms is idealism. 'M' 662 brings all things together in a revised recapitulation of his telic worldview:

END OF CREATION. GLORY OF GOD. It may be inquired why God would have the exercises of his perfections and expressions of his glory known and published abroad. *Ans.* It was meet that his attributes and perfections should be expressed ... It was the will of God that they should be expressed and should shine forth. But if the expressions of his attributes ben't known, they are not; the very being of the expression depends on the perceptions of created understandings. And so much the more as the expression is known, so much more it is.<sup>173</sup>

Edwards seems to think that the greater the number of perceivers, the greater the intensity of God's manifest expression. (This draws a sort of numeric correlation with his aesthetic-philosophical thinking behind God's complex beauty: the greater the representation of 'irregularities' the more complex the beauty.) Divine arbitrariness put aside, the 'end' is one: if God's attributes are not expressed, known and consequently replicated, then 'they are not' – whether on earth, in heaven or hell. And because the realms are created dimensions of a single reality, they share the same sequence of time; an effect in one has a corresponding effect in the other. As the last line of this entry reveals, the issue has become one of intensification. Advancements in redemption history, then, may be conceived as a device to measure the actualization of divine attributes in both realms, as well as the incremental knowledge

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<sup>172</sup> Cf. Chamberlain, 'EI', *Works* 18, 30.

<sup>173</sup> *Works* 18, 200.



perceiving agents may have of the Divine Being. For these reasons, Edwards speaks of the ‘progressive states’ of the earth, heaven and hell.<sup>174</sup>

The earth is the center stage of the drama of redemption history. God’s acts within it are, one way or another, revelatory: knowledge of God goes forth in His spatiotemporal movements, agents perceive these movements, gain knowledge, and facilitate the *ad extra* glorification of God. Likewise, Edwards writes of heaven: ‘’Tis certain that the inhabitants of heaven do increase in their knowledge.’ Saints and angelic hosts witness ‘new and glorious advancements’ that ‘consists very much in BEHOLDING the manifestations that God makes of himself in the WORK OF REDEMPTION.’<sup>175</sup> Their knowledge increases not simply because God unveils/communicates more of Himself, but also because in heaven the view of God is less mediated – so too in hell.<sup>176</sup>

In hell, the ‘MISERY OF DEVILS AND SEPARATE SOULS IS PROGRESSIVE, as well as the happiness of the separated souls of saints, and is advanced at the same time and by like degrees.’<sup>177</sup> The ‘terribleness of God’, which is ‘part of his glory’, must be exercised upon some agent and perceived across *both* sides of the ‘chasm’ by intelligent perceiving minds: ‘a sense of it should be kept up in the minds of creatures is needful in order to their right and just apprehensions of his greatness and gloriousness ... in the spiritual sight and knowledge of him.’<sup>178</sup> To be sure, God exercises sovereignty in the matter: ‘None can enjoy [or suffer] but only as God manifests; the enjoyment [or misery] therefore will be proportionable to the manifestation.’<sup>179</sup> Yet, Edwards believes the Spirit of God makes the minds of separated souls in hell more acute, like ‘lightning’, that they may experience unencumbered and precise sensations of mind. That is, damned souls have certain ‘spiritual sight and knowledge.’ In ‘The Future Punishment of the Wicked Unavoidable and Intolerable’ (1741), he explains that although reprobates on earth cannot perceive divine and spiritual realities, nonetheless ‘God will hereafter make them seem real.’<sup>180</sup> Which is to say, their existence in hell carries with it the full weight of apprehension by immediate intuition, reflection, and affectional encounter; the unified consciousness being acutely aware of all that God intends to communicate about Himself.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> ‘’Tis only God that is unchangeable. The whole universe, consisting in upper and lower worlds, is in a changing state’ (*M*’796, *Works*18, 498).

<sup>175</sup> *M*’701, 777, *Works*18, 283, 427.

<sup>176</sup> *Charity*, *Works*8, 390-92.

<sup>177</sup> *M*’805, *Works*18, 507.

<sup>178</sup> *M*’407, *Works*13, 469.

<sup>179</sup> *M*’702, *Works*18, 299.

<sup>180</sup> *Banner-Works*, 2:79. Cf. *M*’280, *Works*13, 379.

<sup>181</sup> See *M*’713 in which JE relates the infinite punishment God administers to God’s idea of how the reprobates’ punishment will play out. That is, there is no ‘infinite in terms of duration or extremity, but in God’s idea of Himself expressed.’ Holbrook adds: ‘The human mind can[not] [sic] entertain the idea of an infinite degree, but only in the mind of God is sin infinite in both inherent quality and in duration, as is also punishment. “Sin against God, in God’s idea, is infinite ... and the punishment is infinite no



In their progressive perception, experience, and knowledge of God's terribleness, wrath, hatred, furious power, greatness, righteousness in judgment, and glory, the Divine Being perfects the exercise and therefore replication of 'many of the divine attributes that ... never would have had any exercise'. This is how the reprobate's damnation positively contributes to God's program of self-glorification and, secondarily, the happiness of the saints in heaven.

#### 4.b. *The Sinking of the Soul*

That Edwards establishes the immortality of the soul principally in teleology and secondarily in his dispositional ontology is also evident in what he says about the torment of wicked souls in hell. Though the future punishment of the wicked will be unavoidable, remediless, and intolerable, it will nonetheless continue forever for the reason that God intends to be *eternally* manifest *ad extra*. Subordinate to this are the theological reason (that God intends to be glorified in the vindication of His majesty and the execution of judgment) and the ontological reason (that souls are created with lawlike dispositions which love self-being and 'abhor annihilation'). Edwards, of course, typically employs a theorem of proportionate regards concerning the eternality of hell torments and the infinite honor, love, and duty owed to God, but ethics also are a subordinate issue to glorification.<sup>182</sup> It is the expressed exercising of the idea of God's self-glorification that sustains the existence of beings in hell; for, as Edwards says, if it were not for the perfecting of God's attributes, the wicked would cease to exist. Hence, the eternal purpose of God explains why their essential ontological structure inclines in a lawlike manner to being, even in the midst of eternal death:

[I]n hell ... [the soul's] torment and horror will be so great, so mighty, so vastly disproportionate to its strength, that having no strength in the least to support itself, although it be infinitely contrary to the nature and inclination of the soul to utterly sink; yet it will utterly and totally sink, without the least degree of remaining comfort, or strength, or courage, or hope. And though it will never be annihilated, its being and perception will never be abolished; yet such will be the infinite depth of gloominess into which it will sink, that it will be in a state of death, eternal death.<sup>183</sup>

So while wicked men in hell approach the status of 'nothing',<sup>184</sup> yet their existence never extinguishes: reprobates persist as long as they perceive. God, however, had sufficient reason (Edwards' man-made-for-religion thesis) for them to perceive eternally.

Damned reprobates degenerate into almost 'nothing' because their sins and hatred toward God grow: '[A]lthough the strength of their pain is very great ... yet the strength of their malice is proportionably great; which puts them forward industriously to pursue their

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otherwise but in the idea of God; for al that is past and all that is to come, that is not comprehended in finite ideas is not anywhere else but in the divine idea''' ('EI', *Works*3, 40; and 'M'713).

<sup>182</sup> Cf. Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 332-33.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>184</sup> 'M'237, *Works*13, 353.



works of malice, even in the midst of pain.’<sup>185</sup> Edwards dialectically proposes that while their knowledge increases their being decreases, and while being destroyed they perpetuate their existence; and, apologetically, he submits the thesis: the agent that eternally sins is an object of just, eternal punitive retribution.<sup>186</sup> But Edwards’ aesthetic formula best explains wicked man’s approximation to nothingness: ‘Excellency may be distributed into greatness and beauty. The former is the degree of being, the latter is being’s consent to being [in general].’<sup>187</sup> ‘Nothing’ corresponds with diminutive greatness or ‘degree of being’, and because there lacks obvious consent to Being in general, wicked men have no obvious beauty. That is, their ‘excellency’ amounts to almost ‘nothing’. Thus, their progressive ontological ‘ugliness’ offers an eternal aesthetic contribution to God’s complex beauty.<sup>188</sup>

Damned reprobates also have comparatively less being because they have comparatively less arbitrariness of being: ‘And when they [i.e. saints] come to die, the positive effects of God’s arbitrary influence is immensely greater in the souls of the saints in their glorification than in the souls of the wicked in their damnation.’<sup>189</sup> Edwards’ rationale for this pertains to the privation of good in death:

The soul of man and all other created minds ... they stand in great necessity of good. The mere absence of good don’t leave the soul in a state of indifferency without either good or evil; but it is itself an exceeding great evil; it’s an evil necessarily accompanied by dismal, doleful, horrible darkness—it’s death.<sup>190</sup>

In hell, therefore, though the beings of the wicked approaches ‘nothing’ as they dissent from Being in general and indeed have no ‘strength to be’, yet they have a real and valuable existence to God, in terms of life, knowledge, and activity.

What is more, ‘the bodies of wicked men as well as their souls will be punished in hell.’<sup>191</sup> The reason for this is twofold: (1) bodies are added in the resurrection to perfect the exactitude of their sensibilities; and (2) to fit wicked men with proper ‘sepulchers for their souls.’<sup>192</sup> Since Edwards thinks ‘’Tis probable that this earth, after the conflagration, shall be the place of the damned’,<sup>193</sup> it is only ‘meet’ that reprobates possess vehicles adapted to convey elemental torture. Thus, in a world turned into a lake of fire, God enlarges His being in the domain of hell through, in, and upon damned agents. And therein lies the functional value of reprobates in the world and afterlife, according to the Puritan Edwards.

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<sup>185</sup> ‘M’282, *Works13*, 380. It also could be argued that the despairing soul in hell desiring not to be, in turn, actually perpetuates its existence by desiring this good for itself, namely, non-existence. Cf. *Charity*, *Works8*, 390-92.

<sup>186</sup> ‘M’545, *Works18*, 90-92.

<sup>187</sup> ‘The Mind’ 64, *Works6*, 382.

<sup>188</sup> ‘The Mind’ 62, *Works6*, 380-81.

<sup>189</sup> ‘M’1263, *PJE*, 192.

<sup>190</sup> ‘M’427, *Works13*, 480.

<sup>191</sup> Doctrine from Matt. 10:28 (n.d.).

<sup>192</sup> Matt. 23:15 (1736/7).

<sup>193</sup> ‘M’275, *Works13*, 376.



## 5. *Christ the Avenger*

At several points in his book, Stephen Holmes suggests that Jonathan Edwards was ‘uneasy’ with the doctrine of limited atonement. Edwards, Holmes says, was so impressed with the magnitude of Christ’s death that it led him to struggle ‘with the idea that anything could remain untouched by it.’ According to Holmes, Edwards’ difficulties with particular redemption arose out of ontological questions:

[If] the whole of the being of creation is defined by the gospel story, then the being of the reprobate must be so defined, or they become some special class separated from not just true humanity – the elect – but God’s creation as well. Edwards was too sharp a thinker to miss this line, and so felt the need to speak of some universal component of the atonement.<sup>194</sup>

Holmes gives us an uncharacteristically taciturn and laconic Jonathan Edwards who experiments and equivocates in a slow movement toward ‘a genuinely universal sense to the work of redemption’, but in the end fails to let the gospel story ‘sufficiently’ inform his position on the ontology and creation of the reprobate.<sup>195</sup>

For Holmes, there must be some direct connection with the atonement: Christ is elected for the atonement; His elect are elected in Him; thus, the gospel story defines the elect’s human existence. The same must apply to the reprobate or else they must be ‘some special class separated from not just true humanity ... but God’s creation’.<sup>196</sup>

But Holmes defines Edwards’ understanding of gospel story too narrowly, too much in the shadow of Karl Barth.<sup>197</sup> To be sure, Holmes does not re-present the ‘inclusivist’ if not ‘universalist’ Edwards of either Morimoto or McDermott. He recognizes Edwards’ doctrine of reprobation, but he finds it inconsistent with Edwards’ philosophical-theology. Notwithstanding, he does not perceive that, for Edwards, the gospel of Jesus Christ is *two-sided*: in addition to understanding God through Christ’s sufferings and death as Savior and Redeemer, God may be understood from the perspective of Christ’s resurrection as Judge *and* Avenger. There are no less than eleven homilies in Edwards’ sermon corpus that have for their principal doctrine Christ—Judge of the world, as a complementary item to His atoning sacrifice. Which is to say, part of Edwards’ theology of the cross (and God’s perfections

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<sup>194</sup> *God of Glory*, 158-59.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 158, 240.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>197</sup> Similarly, Holmes criticizes JE several times for departing from Luther’s Heidelberg thesis, viz. ‘He deserves to be called a theologian who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.’ This indictment is especially applicable to JE’s non-crucicentric, non-Christological treatment of the reprobate, according to Holmes. However, aside from questioning the methodology of scrutinizing JE with Luther’s ‘second article’ (indeed, Luther himself has been criticized for being overly crucicentric. But again we must bear in mind the context, viz. Luther’s dispute with so-called papist theologians of glory), Holmes perhaps forgets that we see ‘the visible and manifest things of God through suffering and the cross’ from the perspective of the resurrection! Indeed, Luther himself couples the cross with the resurrection, as two sides of the one redemptive coin – within the Heidelberg Disputation itself.



manifest through the Son) is not only the Son condescended, crucified and slain, but also resurrected, victorious, and executing judgment. In short, when Edwards speaks of ‘redemption’, especially the purposes of God in redemption, he has in mind *both* aspects of that work – saving and judging, redeeming and executing punishment. All are predestined in Christ to replicate one side or the other of that single image of God.

For Edwards, what stands before the logical order of decrees – be what they may – is God’s idea of Himself, specifically, His idea of Himself as crucified and risen, slain and victorious. To represent God only as Savior and not Judge is to present God as other than Himself.

In an exegesis of Prov. 16:4, particularly the words, ‘God made all things for Himself ... even the wicked’, Edwards considers why the latter clause was added and concludes: ‘This is added to obviate such a thought, as though God were frustrated, or his aims thwarted and frustrated by wicked men.’ His point is that the wicked are continually useful and valuable to God for His ‘ends and purposes’ in Christ: ‘we are to understand that that is said of Christ, Col. 1:16, “All things are made by him, and for him”; i.e. all things are made by him, and for *his* ends and purposes.’<sup>198</sup> True enough, Christ’s ‘ends and purposes’ are all wrapped up in manifesting the perfections of God (i.e. God’s perfect image of Himself) in and through a gospel story, but Edwards connects both the salvific and punitive sides to the work of redemption. Moreover, the creation and therefore the creatures subordinate to Christ’s ‘ends and purposes’ are also connected:

Because *all things* are subordinated to the work of *redemption*, therefore both the beginning and the end of the world is by the Redeemer; and he is appointed of the Father to be both the Creator and Judge of the world....<sup>199</sup>

Consequently, reprobates are created by Christ and for Christ, and if so, then they are created through and in Christ. Which it to say, just as the elect are predestined in Christ the Redeemer, so too the reprobate are predestined in Christ the Judge and Avenger, for both are ‘subject to the great purposes of redemption’:

Therefore both the beginning of the world and the end of the world are by Christ, *for both are subject to the great purposes of redemption*. He is therefore *both* the Creator and the Judge of the world ... the Alpha and the Omega.<sup>200</sup>

If all knowledge of God is through Jesus Christ, then the reprobate’s knowledge of those attributes manifest in them is through Jesus Christ as the wrathful Judge. Clearly, for Edwards, redemption is a two-sided coin, with parallel purposes to express that one idea, that one image God has of Himself.

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<sup>198</sup> ‘M’581, 586, *Works*18, 117, 121-22. Emphasis added.

<sup>199</sup> ‘M’702, *Works*18, 294. Emphasis added.

<sup>200</sup> ‘Blank Bible’ on Eph. 3.9; cf. Job 18:15 (1731/2). Emphasis added.



The Holy Spirit is involved in the reprobates' creation as well. This is evident from 'The Mind' 45, where Edwards says that 'all that is the perfections of spirits may be resolved into that which is God's perfection, which is love', or the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is represented in self-love and therefore in the being of the reprobate. Thus, reprobates are a Trinitarian creation.

Likewise, reprobates suffer a Trinitarian damnation. In hell, the Spirit increases the capacity of their sensibilities. Edwards adheres closely to a biblical understanding of the Spirit's role in the two-sided redemption story: the ministry of the Spirit is to reveal Jesus Christ, to convince men of sin, righteousness, and of judgment – the judgment of Jesus Christ and, in hell, the punishment He executes.<sup>201</sup> The Spirit acts not only upon the reprobate, but also in them. Edwards, in a number of places, especially in his writings analyzing the Great Awakening, repeatedly speaks of the non-covenantal, non-regenerative influence of the Spirit upon the 'natural sensibilities' of natural-men and reprobates during times of revival.<sup>202</sup> The same idea carries over in hell, but with an intensification of sensibility for the damned, not sporadically, but for all eternity.<sup>203</sup>

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Thus, with respect to Christ as Judge, reprobates have a very real human existence, as well as a valuable role (albeit grim) in God's two-sided gospel-oriented program of self-glorification. For Edwards, the simple fact that Christ is indeed the express image of God as Judge holds as 'sufficient reason' for God to create the reprobate and dispose of them according to His infinite wisdom.

Theologically for Edwards, the principle of human worth depended upon God's creative, judgmental, and (for the elect) saving action, instead of the naturalist virtue proposed by some of his contemporaries.

Since the days of Calvin, the Reformed and Presbyterian churches have been identified with the doctrines of predestination and election. Holmes is right to point out that Karl Barth offered a Christological correction to the aforementioned doctrines: Jesus Christ is at once the electing God and the electing man in whom Israel and the Church are elected and in whom individuals are elected. What Holmes omits from Barth is precisely what stands bold in Edwards' theology, namely, that individuals are also rejected in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>201</sup> 'True Grace Distinguished from the Experience of Devils' (1752), *Banner-Works*, 2:46.

<sup>202</sup> See, for example, *RA, Works* 2, 206-09, 215, 220.

<sup>203</sup> 'M'662, *Works* 18, 200.



## 6. Concluding Remarks

When Edwards sets forth his understanding of the world there can be little doubt that a conviction of the absolute and arbitrary sovereignty of God serves as the cornerstone of his entire thought. Consequently, in his mind, there are not any insurmountable difficulties in theodicy. Instead, the difficulties rest in one's willingness to believe the truths of sovereignty and arbitrariness, as well as one's perception of their reality in world history. For some it may seem incommensurable that God would decree or orchestrate evil in order to judge it or show Himself to be a judge. But, for Edwards, God decrees what is best and most desirable to Himself. God has *sufficient reason* for this world – His own maximal glory,<sup>204</sup> which, in the end, makes this the best world.

God maximizes (for Himself) the moral and aesthetic dimensions of this best world. Questions of incommensurability tend to rest on things moral, but Edwards believes the importance of the aesthetic/ontic does not diminish the importance of the moral. In fact, he considers them so interconnected that they may be considered equivalent and only theoretically distinguishable. While this strengthens Edwards' overall theodicy and thoroughly integrates his worldview, yet it makes it an all or nothing system – one either has spiritual sensibilities and can appreciate divine sovereignty and arbitrariness, or one does not and is left in an endless digression of argumentation to rationalize the biblical worldview. History, however, would remain a powerful apologetical point of contact for Edwards with an unregenerate and skeptical world of deists and philosophers, as we shall see in Chapter V.

History can be explained in terms of three episodes, creation, Christ, and consummation: Edwards' idealism and dispositional ontology factor large in all of them. In the creation man is fashioned in God's mental and moral likeness: dispositions ensure the inalienability of man's essential constitution, as well as the Fall itself. Man's mental dispositions give him the capacity to replicate the Divine. Similar things could be explained concerning Christ.<sup>205</sup>

In the consummation of the age, saints have a counterpart role to the dispositional and idealistic function of reprobates. God's 'ultimate end' is all about intensified and climatic emanation and remanation, for, in Edwards, reciprocity is inherent in the notion of divine communication.<sup>206</sup> Because of their dispositional ontic constitution, reprobates continue to perceive in hell, as they did when natural-men prior to their death and judgment, but with

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<sup>204</sup> 'M' 348, *Works* 13, 419-21.

<sup>205</sup> See Sang Lee's forthcoming 'EI' to *Vol. 20*.

<sup>206</sup> *TV, Works* 8, 551.



greater intensity and sensibility, which, in turn, intensifies God's self-manifestation:<sup>207</sup> hence Edwards' 'sufficient reason' for their eternal existence.<sup>208</sup>

During the Great Awakening period, where we find Edwards frequently explaining in graphic detail the torments of hell, we must not think that he was inaneely employing 'sensational rhetoric' as part of some scare tactic to frighten souls into a state of conversion. There was a sophisticated and well-reasoned metaphysical and ethical system beneath it. Whether or not his imprecatory sermons issued in conversions, he nonetheless was satisfied with the uncomfortable thought that five-sixths of the world going to hell still had and always would have a very real, valuable, and integral place in God's scheme of glorification.<sup>209</sup> Though deists and 'Christian humanists' were scandalized by such a thought, Edwards was not.

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<sup>207</sup> 'M'662, *Works*18, 200.

<sup>208</sup> Holbrook's comments are telling: 'Since evil does occur in this world, and since this is God's world, to what other conclusion can one come? The alternative would be that sin and virtue fall out by blind chance without the plan and design of an intelligent and wise being. And this conclusion would lead at best to the notion of a being seriously deficient in both wisdom and goodness or perhaps to outright atheism. In either case, God would be robbed of his glory, whereas by Edwards' interpretation, God receives his full due ...' ('EI', *Works*3, 64).

<sup>209</sup> 'End of the Wicked Contemplated by the Righteous' (1733), *Worcester-Works*, 4:290-91.



## Chapter V

### *Dispositional Peculiarity, History, and Edwards’ Evangelistic Appeal to Self-Love*

1. The Fiction of ‘Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation’
  - 1.a. From Infants to Infidels
  - 1.b. Lombard, Aquinas, and Edwards: Uncreated and Created Grace
  - 1.c. ‘As soon as ever divine grace enters, the man is willing’
  - 1.d. What is real, the basis of what is legal
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***Dispositional Peculiarity, History, and Edwards' Evangelistic  
Appeal to Self-Love***

None but those that do live under the calls of the Gospel shall be saved ... That  
is God's way and his only way of bringing men to salvation, viz. the Gospel.

MS sermon on Mt. 22:14

Jonathan Edwards' worldview consists of a vision of God in which the Deity accomplishes His purposes through a metaphysic of finality. Human beings are the central means by which God's purposes come to fruition. Whether the saintly Paul, reprobate Judas, or the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, all human beings are valuable in themselves by virtue of their ontic composition and, especially, their functional role within God's bilateral redemption scheme.

Is Edwards a misanthropist? No, he recognizes the dreadfulness of the doctrine of hell and laments that 'tis a common thing for persons to go to hell.' Yet, in unison, he perceives and appreciates the revealed truth and even the beauty of double particular election. So, in the 'Sole Consideration, that God is God', Edwards resigns 'All Objections to His Sovereignty', and in light of its arbitrary 'excellence', he lovingly ascribes absolute sovereignty to God.<sup>1</sup>

Do men go to hell and suffer eternal torments? Not only does Edwards answer, 'Yes', but says that it is necessarily so. But he no more than any of his predestinarian predecessors had any knowledge of who—while in their natural state—were elect and who were reprobate. However, a few things were certain to him by way of special revelation: (1) no soul since Adam's lapse was, is, or will be, created with a holy disposition that unites them to God, save for the God-man Jesus Christ; (2) this same Jesus accomplished redemption through an atoning sacrifice of Himself; (3) the sum total of Christ's redemptive purchase was the Holy Spirit; and (4) God applies the reconciling and regenerative benefits of Christ's redemptive 'purchase' (i.e. the Spirit) through divinely appointed gospel 'means and ordinances.'

In the last point we find that Edwards thoroughly subscribes to the Reformation theology of *theatrum salutis* (forum of salvation); a theory which purports that the dissemination of the gospel word creates a 'forum' in which God communicates Christ's saving benefits by the Spirit through faith. Salvation or, synonymously, conversion, for Edwards, is a black or white issue: one is either savingly united to Christ the Redeemer or one is not. Although with his Reformed predecessors he says that God possesses the liberty to convert a soul without ordinary, gospel-conveying means,<sup>2</sup> yet salvation always contains the same objective elements of (a) regeneration – conversion through the 'ingeneration' of a holy disposition; (b)

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<sup>1</sup> (1735), *Banner-Works*, 2:107f; *PN, Works* 16, 792.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. The Second Helvetic Confession (1566) states that 'We know ... that God can illuminate whom and when He will, even without the eternal ministry, for that is His power' (c. 1).



humiliation; (c) faith; (d) repentance; (e) trust; (f and g) adoption and justification. Extraordinary cases pertain to infants and the Old Testament church. But even with these cases Edwards has his logocentric qualifiers.

Nonetheless, the ordinary, regular, ordained and only means of salvation lies in heralding the gospel of Jesus Christ. Edwards repeatedly would assert a seemingly restrictivist position by insisting that special revelatory concepts of *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *solus Christus*, are absolutely necessary for salvation. Nothing else can issue forth saving grace. Hence Edwards' evangelistic zeal and pastoral concerns. Without saving grace men are 'doomed.' His responsibility as a called and ordained ambassador of Jesus Christ was to proclaim the good news within the construct of 'the whole counsel of God', i.e. His revealed law and decrees.

By this account, Edwards seems no more adrift in his evangelistic theology than Martin Luther with his *fides ex auditu* thesis, or William Perkins in his *Arte of Prophesying*, or the Westminster divines for that matter.<sup>3</sup> If salvation is about Christ, and Christ is the Word, and, as Luther put it, the nature of the word is to be heard,<sup>4</sup> then salvation is always logocentric, always a faith response to the living Word of God.

However, recent revisionist accounts of Edwards' thought argue otherwise. Anri Morimoto, for example, reinterprets Edwards' evangelistic concerns in light of his philosophy of dispositions, and asserts that Stoddard's successor was not concerned with salvation from damnation per se, but with justification, something totally different. According to Morimoto, initial salvation occurred at the cross: this work of Christ is universal in scope and application – all reap the saving benefit of an infused gracious disposition. The bare (i.e. unexercised) possession of it constitutes regeneration and, therefore, salvation. For Morimoto, Edwards' soteriology is primarily about ontological transformation; justification is a secondary issue.

So, in addition to this kind of universalism, Edwards also evinces a more prominent inclusivistic position, particularly when he publicly presses for a justified community. In Morimoto's reading, Edwards' evangelistic preaching was not about salvation from imminent damnation, but intended to 'trigger' the gracious disposition to an exercise of faith, thereby 'converting' the individual and allowing them the benefit of *affectionally* enjoying Christ's saving work. According to Morimoto, when an individual exercises their inherent gracious disposition in faith, God 'rewards' them with a second salvation.<sup>5</sup> Since all are, for all intents and purposes, accounted believers because of the faith *virtually* contained within the disposition (hence, its lawlike *tendency*), only those who exercise it attain this sort of 'higher Christian life.' Regeneration and conversion are utterly distinct phases or levels of salvation. The disposition, Morimoto maintains, is not unlike Edwardsean dispositions in causality: in a

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<sup>3</sup> Title of Ernst Bizer's study of Luther's doctrine of justification: *Fides ex Auditu*; Perkins, *Arte of Prophesying*, *Workes Perkins*, 2:643-73; *WCF* cc. VIII, X, XIV.

<sup>4</sup> *WA*, 4:9: '*Natura verbi est audiri.*'

<sup>5</sup> *Catholic Vision*, 100.



prescribed connection, a lawlike disposition yields its manifestation. In this case, the gracious disposition yields faith amidst divinely ordained ‘means and ordinances’. Hence, the full title of Morimoto’s book: *Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation*. ‘Means and ordinances’ have an *ex opere operato* effect upon the disposition that Christ has made inherent in all. Still, not all religions have these ‘means and ordinances’, and so it is in this sense that Edwards cannot be called a thoroughgoing Universalist.

Gerald R. McDermott advances Morimoto’s revision as he considers Edwards’ extensive interest in non-Christian religions. While convincingly arguing that deism, not Arminianism, was Christianity’s most formidable opponent in Edwards’ eyes, McDermott suggests that Edwards was preparing before his death a sophisticated theological response to Enlightenment religion that hinged on the relationship between reason and revelation. McDermott demonstrates, for example, that Edwards perpetuated the *prisca theologia*, a tradition dating back to the early church fathers that looked for elements of ‘true religion’ in non-Christian systems of thought, such as Greek philosophy and Chinese I-Ching. He explains that Edwards’ principal purpose in employing the *prisca theologia* was to show against the deists, ‘that nearly all humans have received revelation, and therefore all knowledge of true religion among the heathen is from revelation rather than the light of natural reason.’<sup>6</sup> The upshot means that philosophical and theological reasoning about ethics and religion becomes the product of prior revelation and may be expanded by natural revelation. Taking his lead from Morimoto, McDermott argues that, in light of Edwards’ dispositional philosophy, the combination of the powers of reasoning in the ‘heathen’ and the plethora of natural revelation available to them allows for the possibility of those unreached by the gospel—the ‘five-sixths of the world’ who not so much have heard of Christianity—to worship and even be ‘justified’, i.e. converted, by the Christian God of special revelation, *without* having to explicitly trust in Jesus Christ for salvation.<sup>7</sup> Just as the disposition yields justifying faith in connection with Christian ‘means and ordinances’ in Morimoto’s ‘Catholic Vision of Salvation’, so too, according to McDermott, God has provided the ‘heathen’ with non-Christian ‘means and ordinances’ to educe an exercise of ‘faith’ for their justification. Edwards is not an inclusivist regarding ‘second salvation’, but a hyper-inclusivist.

Why then Edwards’ concern with justification? Answer: Eschatology. An expanded, i.e. worldwide, community of justified believers hastens the establishment of Christ’ kingdom on earth and, consequently, His parousia and bodily reign. Edwards, therefore, is eschatology/apocalypse driven in his evangelism, not soteriology driven.

My conclusions in this chapter differ decidedly from those of Morimoto and McDermott. The unconverted/unjustified glorify God on a metaphysical and aesthetic level, never in terms

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<sup>6</sup> *Confronts the Gods*, 94.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 12-13. Cf. Morimoto, *Catholic Vision*, 78-101.



of ‘true religion’, unless, of course, one calls bearing the punitive attributes of God ‘religious worship’. To be sure, there is a sense in which the unconverted fulfill a doxological role in their associations with secondary beauties, but this is categorically different from the ‘true religion’ and ‘virtue’ of primary beauty. There are three main reasons for this. First, Edwards, in no uncertain terms, resolutely denies that non-Christians have gracious dispositions and therefore epistemological access to truly moral and spiritual dimensions of reality. In a word, no gracious disposition means no regeneration, no salvation, no spiritual data, and no justification. Second, his soteriology does not permit a hard and fast distinction between regeneration and conversion; indeed, he often uses the terms interchangeably. Third, Edwards does not divorce regenerating grace from the divinely ordained means of special revelation – the word of God. There may be extraordinary cases, but on the whole Edwards remains skeptical and restrictivistic. To him, unregenerates cannot access regenerating grace in natural revelation because the oral tradition of the *prisca theologia* was (a) never intended to redeem, that is, it was not an ‘ends’ but a ‘means’; (b) it was superseded by special revelation in a covenantal context and (c) contextualized within the history of redemption as being merely preparatory for that which does facilitate regenerative salvation – the gospel means of Christ.

Which is to say, Morimoto and McDermott misinterpret Edwards’ philosophy of dispositions and, consequently, his soteriology, evangelistic engagement with unbelievers, and vision of the history of the work of redemption. In this chapter, I will therefore consider how Edwards’ conception of the natural-man/reprobate manifests itself in particular aspects of his theology, as well as his practical ministerial vision, through a critical assessment of the aforementioned scholars’ recent monographs on these subjects.

### **1. *The Fiction of ‘Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation’***

While Morimoto’s thesis may be an inspired offshoot of Sang Lee’s work on Edwards and dispositions, his motivation for casting Edwards as an inclusivist does not stem from Lee, but from an expressed aversion to the restrictivistic soteriological doctrines of confessional Calvinism and sympathetic collaboration with inclusivist if not universalist theologies of John Sanders, Clark Pinnock, and Hans Küng.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, when Morimoto says, ‘The implication of [Edwards’] dispositional view is not limited to the Christian community ... Edwards’s soteriology envisions a new and radical paradigm for understanding the salvation of people who are called “non-Christian”’,<sup>9</sup> the Northampton minister usually described as a ‘Calvinist metaphysician’<sup>10</sup> comes off sounding as progressive as John Hick.

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<sup>8</sup> *Catholic Vision*, 2, 64-69.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Quote from Bebbington, ‘Remembered Around the World’.



By extending the implication of Edwards' dispositional views 'a little further,' Morimoto believes we may with Edwards reconsider the destiny of those who stand outside the visible circle of Christian faith: 'In Edwards's view of faith, the division between Christians and non-Christians is not simply a division between those who have faith and those who do not. Rather, the difference lies in whether or not the disposition into faith has been actualized.'<sup>11</sup> Which is to say, the mere possession of a disposition that embodies the tendency to exercise faith and not the actual exercise of faith itself provides common ground in which all may share 'salvation'. In order to ascertain the viability of this proposal Morimoto evaluates three presumably decisive questions: 'Is this change of disposition really the work of the Holy Spirit? Does the Spirit work in any way other than infusing and indwelling in human nature? Can the new disposition remain dormant and unexercised?'<sup>12</sup>

Concerning the first question, Morimoto rightly affirms on Edwards' behalf that, indeed, the change of disposition is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, the Spirit does work upon man other than through infusion and indwelling by assisting what man possesses as inherent principles. Lastly, Morimoto states that the new disposition can remain dormant and unexercised for not only extended periods, but also the whole life of an individual.

Having satisfied his criteria for plausibility, Morimoto articulates the significance of his answers in terms of soteriology. Christ's redemptive work achieves a universal restoration of a gracious disposition in every newly created soul. That is, all persons either sometime during their prenatal development or shortly after their birth are savingly infused (regenerated) with what amounts to 'created grace'. 'Uncreated grace' (the Spirit) may assist in the exercising of the disposition, which, in turn, would result in 'Christian conversion' and a 'reward' of justification. The condition of the Spirit's presence (particularly during revivals) and certain external 'means and ordinances' trigger a faith response and, as Morimoto describes it, 'God Crowns His Own Gift' of regeneration with conversion and justification. But then again, if all these conditions are not present during a person's lifetime the disposition remains dormant. This lapse of time translates into the difference between regeneration and conversion. Thus,

one must conclude that non-Christians can be saved on the same grounds. They may not as yet manifest their saving disposition into a faith that is specifically Christian, but they might as well be given the disposition and counted as saved because of that disposition. They may even remain non-Christian for their whole lifetime, and still be saved ... The point is whether they *have* the saving disposition, not whether they *exercise* it or not.<sup>13</sup>

### **1.a. *From Infants to Infidels***

While Morimoto acknowledges that Edwards usually did not make fastidious distinctions between such terms as calling, regeneration, and conversion, but rather they all mean the

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<sup>11</sup> *Catholic Vision*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.



same reality of grace infused at one instance, yet he asserts that, for Edwards, the case with infants was different: ‘he had to admit that “regeneration” is a better word than “conversion.”’<sup>14</sup> Which is to say, infants are, by an ostensibly universal infusion of grace, regenerated but not converted. For the subject, the difference between them lies in the ‘sensibleness’ of grace, for God the difference lies between initial salvation and secondary justification, between regeneration and conversion: the one is universal and instantaneous, the other occasional and gradual.

According to Morimoto, once Edwards made this distinction with infants the next step was to consider unconverted infidels. He appeals to ‘M’393 as evidence: ‘a person according to the gospel may be in a state of salvation,’ writes Edwards, ‘before a distinct and express act of faith.’ On Edwards’ behalf, Morimoto concludes that no act of the disposition whatsoever ‘neither faith nor humiliation, is necessary at all for one to be in the state of salvation’, and cites Edwards to this effect from ‘M’27b: ‘The disposition is all that can be said to be absolutely necessary.’<sup>15</sup> Morimoto believes that Edwards, so impressed with the magnitude of Christ’s redemptive work, could not conceive that the gracious disposition was procured for only a small fraction of the world’s population. Thus, once Edwards began to affirm that infants who did not ‘sensibly’ exercise the gracious disposition are saved (because their habit possessed its own mode of reality—a virtual exercise of faith—even before it exercised itself in faith or in other virtuous habits), he could not but affirm that many infants mature never exercising their converting dispositions but remained ‘saved’ just the same. The principle held true for Edwards not just in the New World, but the whole world.

But in both ‘M’ entries, as well as 849, Morimoto completely neglects the context in which Edwards makes these and similar statements, and thereby misconstrues their intended meaning. The discussions in ‘M’27b, 393, and 849, which produce the above quotes, entail the *appearance* of ‘a principle of faith’ *to the agent* by its exercises, or, as Edwards writes, ‘a discovery of the of the mercy of God in Christ, whereby [a person] becomes justified *in his own conscience*, and *acquires a sense* of his own justification.’<sup>16</sup> Regeneration and conversion are simultaneous and instantaneous; *consciousness* of its effect is not necessarily so. These ‘M’ refer to the subjective apprehension of gracious exercises, not the objective exercises attendant with regeneration. Since ‘the graces are all the same in principle’, humiliation, faith and trust all occur simultaneously *at the moment of infusion*.<sup>17</sup> The agent, however, may only ‘see’ them one at a time and consciously have corresponding affections on an occasion that may not always coincide with the time of infusion. An infant, of course, cannot properly

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>15</sup> Morimoto, *Catholic Vision*, 32; JE, *Works*13, 213.

<sup>16</sup> ‘M’393, *Works*13, 458. Emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 457.



discern its ‘sinful, doleful condition’ so as to express *affectional* humiliation, repentance, and faith. Though humiliation, repentance, and faith are absolutely necessary for salvation, according to Edwards, yet the *conscious and affectional* exercising of them is not. Strictly speaking, *as to the agent*, ‘The disposition is all that can be said to be absolutely necessary.’ However, when the infant matures, he/she may have a subsequent exercise of the gracious disposition, which, again, *as to the agent*, may be considered a conversion.<sup>18</sup>

Edwards is not saying anything substantially different from what his Puritan forbearers said in their examinations of ‘cases of conscience’—protracted attempts to assure beleaguered parishioners of their justified status with special reference to the application of Christian ethics to specific cases.<sup>19</sup> The objective reality of Christ’s work and covenant held true even when ‘distinguishing marks’ lay dormant. Quite simply, ‘M’27b, 393 and 849 are not about the order of saving activities, much less ‘God Crowning His Own Gift’. To be sure, Edwards expresses a certain measure of anxiousness, not over particularity, but about how God gets His glory through the communication of Christ’s salvific attributes (‘M’849).

Moreover, Edwards is not optimistic and inclusivistic about infant salvation, but rather pessimistic and particularistic. ‘M’816 (c.1740) bears out his skepticism.<sup>20</sup> There he writes: ‘The following reasons seem to render it probable that FEW ARE CONVERTED IN INFANCY’, and delineates items which emerge from and terminate in his teleological worldview. He states that humiliation, repentance, and faith are necessary for salvation because such responses are ‘fitting’ to the Creator/creature relationship, especially in light of man’s sinfulness and total dependence. In these divinely mediated responses God receives due honor and glory – the ‘ends’ of creation. But in the hypothesis of infant salvation the *principal purposes* of creation seem to go unfulfilled. God infuses ‘the new creation [i.e. disposition]’ into an agent ‘to be in him a vital principle’, not to remain unexercised or dormant (which, incidentally, would contradict Edwards’ teaching on ontic-mental dispositions; v.i. §1.c). In other words, regeneration or conversion is purposeful; there is an idealist metaphysic of finality that controls the redemption narrative.<sup>21</sup> To Edwards infant salvation does not make obvious the telic purpose of their regeneration/conversion; it is out of step with God’s program of self-glorification in replication. Therefore, it is probable that ‘FEW ARE CONVERTED IN INFANCY’.

Thus, Edwards remained unsure of the grounds of infant salvation and skeptical that more than a few *covenant children* might be saved from hell.<sup>22</sup> Morimoto, however, does not

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 456-57.

<sup>19</sup> See Perkins, ‘A Dialogue of the State of a Christian’ in *A Treatise tending unto a Declaration, whether a Man Be in the Estate of Damnation, or the Estate of Grace*, in *Workes Perkins*, 2; ‘The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience’, *Workes Perkins*, 2:1-152; Ames, *De conscientia et eius iure vel casibus* (1631).

<sup>20</sup> See ‘Book of Controversies’, esp. §13, but also §§4-8, 106, 11a and 15.

<sup>21</sup> ‘M’702, *Works*18, 97.

<sup>22</sup> See ‘M’n, 713, 771, 772, 816 and *Works*3, 410. According to JE, infants which came under ‘gracious influences’ were likely to be the offspring of a believing parent or parents, who would have the word in



seem at all conscious of Edwards' all-pervading theocentrism and, consequently, interprets his position on infant salvation as non-teleological. Therefore, to make further application to 'infidels' only moves oneself another step away from Edwards' thinking.

### 1.b. Lombard, Aquinas, and Edwards: Uncreated and Created Grace

'Grace in the heart', Edwards writes, 'is no other than the Spirit of God dwelling in the heart and becoming there a principle of life and action.'<sup>23</sup> Morimoto reads a statement like this and associates Edwards' idea of grace in the soul as the direct presence of the Holy Ghost with Peter Lombard's pneumatology, which identifies both the infused gift (*donum*) and the giver (*donator*) with *gratia increata* (uncreated grace) or the Spirit Himself.<sup>24</sup>

However, according to Morimoto, Edwards was not only strongly inclined toward the Lombardian motif, he also fully embraced the Thomistic habitual principle of *gratia creata* (created grace). Aquinas believed that without an intermediary habit for the Spirit to work through, the mind would function in a way contrary to the nature of a voluntary act. As Morimoto explains: 'In order for the will to be itself ... "there should be in us some habitual form superadded to the natural power, inclining that power to the act of charity."' <sup>25</sup> Thus, if we are to understand Edwards 'correctly', we must view his notion of internal principle as 'a close correlative of Thomas's notion of the "intermediary habit,"' though without rejecting the Lombardian motif. The Spirit never '*becomes* created grace', but He does 'issue in' the formation of a new habit through which He operates. Consequently, according to Morimoto,

while virtue is a product of God's supernatural and immediate work of infusion, it is nonetheless a virtue of one's own. It is so because the infused gift is really *in-fused*, namely, let *into* the depths of human nature and *fused* with it, establishing there an intrinsic principle of action. The grace infused from outside does not eradicate or supplant human freedom.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, the virtue that issues from the supernaturally implanted disposition is *our* virtue, a created virtue or grace. Edwards, therefore, may be seen to depart from Calvin (who concurs with Lombard and rejects Thomas on this point) and prove himself more of a

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and about them ('M'849 [TS Beinecke]; Acts 11:12-13 [1750/1]). Which is to say, in this 'extraordinary' case he remains logocentric. Nonetheless, JE's skepticism did not diminish in the 1750s but *grew*! In his *Humble Inquiry* (1749), *Farewell Sermon* (1750), and *Misrepresentations Corrected* (1752), two themes ring clear: that many New England parishioners (including those of his former Northampton Church) were deceived in thinking themselves saved – baptism notwithstanding; and, as David D. Hall explains it, 'condemning as insincere the practice, crucial to the being of popular religion, of allowing parents readily to secure baptism for their children ... What else did the townspeople [of New England] regard as a "known and established principle" that Edwards now condemned as hypocrisy? Nothing less than the central motif of popular religion, the expectation of lay men and women that their children would benefit from the sacrament of baptism' ('EI', *Works* 12, 59).

<sup>23</sup> MS 'Blank Bible' note on Gal. 5:17.

<sup>24</sup> *Catholic Vision*, 43. Cf. Lombardi, *Sententiae In IV Libris Distinctae*, 1, 2, 142.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 42. Cf. *Summa Theologia*, 2-2.23.2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.



Tridentine theologian than a Reformation theologian with regards to the doctrine of regeneration. Or so it would seem, for these claims may be disproved on at least four points.

First, Morimoto's argument rests, in part, on an argument from silence: 'Edwards may not have been aware of this controversy [i.e. the Reformation/counter-Reformation debate about the nature of the operation of grace in humanity] at all. He does not use the terms "created grace" and "uncreated grace" characteristic to the controversy.'<sup>27</sup> So Morimoto takes the liberty to fill in the blanks. But he need not do so. Edwards has plenty to say about the nature of the operation of grace in humanity without having to open the *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*. For instance, Edwards manifests, if not his knowledge of the debate, at least his understanding of the principal distinctions and use of nomenclature:

Yet the grace of God in men's hearts can hardly be called created. 'Tis God's own beauty and excellency that is uncreated and eternal, which is not properly made but communicated. It is as we said before the Spirit of Christ itself; it is God himself. Therefore, they that are full of grace are full of Christ; [that is] they are full of God.<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, for Edwards, the habit *is* and *remains* the Spirit, not something created. Likewise, the acts of the Spirit are not *gratia creata* but the very fruit of the Spirit, *gratia increata*:

The saint acts only by the Spirit in all their transactions wherein they act by a mediator; i.e. in all their transactions with God, they act by the Spirit, *or rather it is the Spirit of God that acts in them* ... The Holy Spirit dwelling in them is their principle of life and action.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, neither the origin nor function of the principle indicates that anything new is created in man in terms of a spontaneously generated disposition through which the Spirit works.

Second, the same applies to holy virtues and actions – they are manifestations of the Spirit, just as the above quote indicates. For Edwards, there is no distinction: the Spirit *is* a personal disposition of holiness given immediately by God and grace can only be grace if God is the only and immediate source, medium, and result of grace: \*

There is no gift or benefit that is so much of himself, of his nature, that is so much a communication of the Deity as grace is ... 'Tis therefore fit that when it is bestowed, it should be so much the more immediately given, from himself and by himself.

Or consider the following excerpt from *God Glorified in Man's Dependence*:

The several ways wherein the dependence of one being may be upon another for its good, and wherein the redeemed of Jesus Christ depend on God for all their good are these, viz. That they have their good of him, and that they have all through him, and that they have all in him: That he is the *cause* and original whence all their good comes, therein it is *of* him; and that he is the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>28</sup> 2Cor. 3:18(a) (1728). JE preached this sermon under Stoddard's tenure. If JE came to Northampton without knowing the controversy and/or relevant concepts (which is doubtful), he soon found instruction under his grandfather's tutelage.

<sup>29</sup> 'M'614, *Works* 18, 146. Emphasis added.



*medium* by which it is obtained and conveyed, therein they have it *through* him; and that he is the *good itself* given and conveyed, therein it is *in* him.<sup>30</sup>

So, while it remains true that the virtues of the Spirit are a gift, yet they are not separable from the divine nature. In short, the ‘principle of life and action’, which Morimoto believes to be in some sense created, is simply another way for Edwards to talk about the *manner* of the Spirit’s indwelling and operation; that is, to talk about uncreated grace.

Third, Morimoto misses the point that the occasional advances in sanctification, or sporadic manifestations of ‘the fruit of the Spirit’, are not due to Edwards’ causal theory of dispositions, but the weakly-arbitrary operation of the indwelling Spirit. Which is to say, the progressive state of sanctification (Calvin’s ‘secondary sanctification’) is no less dependent upon the full and immediate operation and will of God than in regeneration. Though Edwards links the disposition of holiness to ‘means of grace’ (discussed below, §3), yet the arrangement perpetually remains non-causal. The blessings of salvation in this life, viz. sanctifying graces, depend ‘wholly and entirely on God’s immediate and arbitrary bestowment.’<sup>31</sup> ‘Means’ merely provide a ‘proper and fit’ opportunity for the exercise of grace, but they in no way trigger an exercise. Nothing does, for there are no ‘laws’ which govern the operation of the Spirit, other than a covenantal agreement between the members of the Godhead concerning the advancement of Christ’s kingdom – the vehicle by which God moves toward His consummate goal. Hence,

The Word and ordinances and works of God are means of grace, as they give opportunity for the *proper and fit* exercise of grace, and are in a sort of means of that exercise; though not in the same manner as things are the means of the exercise of natural principles, because *not only the principle of grace, but every exercise of it, is the immediate effect of the sovereign acting of the Spirit of God*. Indeed, in natural things, means of effects, in metaphysical strictness, are not proper causes of the effects, but only occasions. God produces all effects; but yet he ties natural events to the operation of such means, or causes them to be consequent on such means according to fixed, determinate and unchangeable rules, which are called the laws of nature ... *But means of grace are not means of the exercises of grace in such a manner, for the actings of the Spirit in the heart are more arbitrary and are not tied to such and such means by such laws or rules*, as shall particularly and precisely determine in a stated method every particular exercise and the degree of it.<sup>32</sup>

The upshot of this important quote is fourfold: (i) though means are ‘necessary’ for both regeneration and progressive sanctification, yet they are not sufficient; (ii) Morimoto’s notion that, ‘The act of faith must naturally and necessarily arise out of the disposition on specific occasions’, i.e. ‘When certain conditions are met, the disposition as an active and purposive tendency ... come[s] into exertion’, proves false;<sup>33</sup> (iii) Edwards’ explanation of the Spirit infused into the hearts of men ‘only after this general law, viz. that it shall remain there and

<sup>30</sup> ‘M’537, *Works*18, 83; (1731), *Banner-Works*, 2:3-7.

<sup>31</sup> 1Pet. 1:3 (1732).

<sup>32</sup> ‘M’629, *Works*18, 157. Emphasis mine. Cf. *Works*2, 259-60. See also Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 123.

<sup>33</sup> *Catholic Vision*, 32, 62. Although JE, like Malebranche, maintained that the grace of universal providence was governed by general laws, yet both insisted that saving graces were particular providences.



produce acts *after the manner of* an abiding, natural, vital, principle of action', simply underscores his emphasis on resemblance not exact equivalence;<sup>34</sup> and (iv) Morimoto's thesis that conversion and justification are consequent upon a latter encounter with means, in which a previously infused, regenerative, but dormant disposition becomes active, is rendered foundationless: there are no laws, rules, constant conjunctions, occasionalistic connections, or any other causal relation between the exercising of the disposition of holiness and means that 'trigger' faith, save for the weakly-arbitrary operation of the Spirit.<sup>35</sup> 'Means' have more of an aesthetic and mediatorial function: 'they give opportunity for the *proper and fit* exercise of grace'.

Fourth and lastly, Edwards says in no uncertain terms that the disposition is not *in-fused* in the same sense that Morimoto indicates. Rather, the disposition of holiness and all the gifts and virtues associated with it could leave man's heart at any time just as the Spirit left Adam, because they are *not* essential to human nature. The Spirit stays, however, because of a covenantal agreement: the believer belongs to Christ and Christ has 'purchased' the Spirit for them – forever.<sup>36</sup> Man does not become intrinsically holy. Instead, he is always a sinner, but also a justified sinner, i.e. a saint, because of Christ's imputed righteousness, his being divinely constituted in Christ, and his ontological union with Christ that communicates all of His 'excellencies'.<sup>37</sup> Hence, Edwards maintains that even in heaven it is theoretically possible for God to withdraw this gracious disposition, since the redeemed are not and never become 'gods', union and participation notwithstanding.<sup>38</sup> In sum, the disposition of which Edwards speaks simply is not the same as that of Aquinas.

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Edwards shows his familiarity with the Scholastic and Tridentine division between 'created' and 'uncreated' grace and expressly distances himself from the former type. Morimoto therefore errs in his appraisal of Edwardsean dispositions and doctrine of regeneration. Edwards is neither a prototypical Karl Rahner, grounding justification in the disposition of the human person and further attempting to urge the notion that created grace demands, as its proper correlative, uncreated grace, nor is he a forerunner to Paul Tillich or Sir Francis Younghusband who succumb to the logic of universalism.<sup>39</sup> Morimoto arrives at his

<sup>34</sup> 'M'629, *Works*18, 157. Emphasis mine. In 'M'709 and other entries, JE repeatedly stresses the point that the Spirit simply 'acts as a principle' in the redeemed (334-35).

<sup>35</sup> 'M'689, *Works*18, 253. *V.s.* Chapter IV, §1.b. Cf. Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 93-103.

<sup>36</sup> 'M'402: 'The sum of all that Christ purchased in the Holy Ghost' (*Works*13, 466). See also 'M'755, *Works*18; and Holmes, *God of Glory*, 142-47.

<sup>37</sup> 'Christ, the Light of the World' (c.1721), *Works*10, 543; 'M'571, *Works*18, 111.

<sup>38</sup> 'M'957 [TS Beinecke]; Col. 1:12 (1756).

<sup>39</sup> See Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 1:319-46. Here I refer to the well-known words of Tillich that particular religions are only provisional and inevitably must discard their particularity: 'In the depths of every living religion there is a point at which the religion itself loses its importance, and that to which it points breaks through its particularity to a vision of spiritual freedom and to a vision of the



conclusions because he asks the wrong questions about dispositions and the nature of regenerating grace. His second question should not be, ‘Does the Spirit work in any other way than infusing and indwelling in human nature?’, but rather, ‘Does the Spirit work in any other way *within the regenerate* to produce spiritual manifestations?’ For he takes a principle which Edwards reserves for the Spirit’s influence upon natural-men, namely, *assisting* their natural, inherent principles, and unacceptably applies it to those indwelt by the Spirit, thereby creating an intermediary element between the Spirit and His virtuous expressions.

As a result of his misappropriation of dispositions, Morimoto’s third question, ‘Can a new disposition remain dormant and unexercised?’, suggests a Thomistic soteriology of ontological transformation and subsequent conversion and justification which Edwards hardly would have countenanced, let alone acknowledged as his own.

### 1.c. ‘*As soon as ever divine grace enters, the man is willing*’

In order to separate the instantaneousness of justification from regeneration, Morimoto proposes: (a) that the infused disposition (Holy Spirit) can remain dormant subsequent to ingeneration; (b) that conversion (and resulting justification) ‘takes a long and gradual process before it is fully realized’;<sup>40</sup> and (c) that faith becomes an inherent quality in man consequent upon the infused disposition.

We have already dealt with (c) by showing that any fruit of the disposition is the very fruit of the Spirit Himself, or the virtues of Christ communicated through the regenerate’s participatory union by the Holy Spirit. According to Edwards, the communion of saints with Christ consists, at the very least, in receiving of His fullness and partaking of His grace: ‘And in partaking of that Spirit which God gives not by measure unto him, partaking of Christ’s holiness and grace, his nature, inclinations, tendencies, affection, love, desires, must be a part of communion with him.’<sup>41</sup> If no communion, then none of these graces issue; for they are not merely *of* Christ, but are *through* Him and *to* Him, and *are* Him. In Edwards, whatever Christ assumes into union to Himself must be by the Holy Spirit that acts as the principle of union.<sup>42</sup>

What of (a) and (b) then? First (a). While it holds true that, for Edwards, some dispositions *D*, particularly those that relate to phenomenological occurrences, can remain inactive for nearly the whole duration of *D*, yet he proposes an entirely different set of rules for mental dispositions to accommodate their arbitrariness.

According to Edwards, an agent cannot be said to possess a given *ontological* disposition *D*, where *D* may be counted as constitutive of an agent’s ontic structure either by necessity or

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spiritual presence in other expressions of the ultimate meaning of man’s existence’ (*Christianity and the Encounter with World Religions*, 97); George Seaver, *Francis Younghusband, Explorer and Mystic*.

<sup>40</sup> *Catholic Vision*, 32.

<sup>41</sup> ‘M’683, *Works*18, 247.

<sup>42</sup> ‘M’709, *Works*18, 335.



participatory union, unless *D* is exercised. That is, such dispositions must manifest *at least* an initiatory exercise or else it is ‘of no manner of use’; that is, they are not constitutive of that agent’s ontic structure because there lacks consciousness of it as its own ‘ideal-existence’. Which is to say, an ontic-mental disposition without an initiatory exercise must be classified not as one with a virtual mode of reality, but as non-existent. Consequently, in Edwards, there is a difference between constitutive ontological dispositions that define human being and nature as such and dispositional properties exemplifying personal propensities, characteristics, and traits. One could be dispositionally courageous without ever having the opportunity to express it, but one could not possess an ontic disposition of holy consent to God without an initiatory exercise of it.

In the network of phenomenological occurrences, dispositions without perceivable or actual applications may be assumed, but within mental structures they cannot, for their express mode of reality constitutes the ‘ideal-existence’ of the agent who possesses them. It is the difference between *actually* being a certain category of human being and not. In Edwards’ soteriology, real dispositional union is crucial for justification, for ‘What is real in the union between Christ and his people, is the foundation of what is legal.’<sup>43</sup> By equating the two distinct kinds of dispositions within Edwards’ philosophical-theology, Morimoto builds his thesis not upon dormant dispositions but defunct dispositions.

In ‘M’241 titled, ‘REGENERATION’, Edwards writes: ‘It may be in the new birth as it is in the first birth.’ While he notes that the vivification of a prenatal infant ‘is exceedingly gradual’, ‘Yet’, he quickly points out, ‘there is a certain moment that an immortal spirit begins to exist in it by God’s appointment.’ Recalling Edwards’ point about infant regeneration and the gradual, subjective apprehension of converting graces, he continues by saying, ‘there is doubtless a remarkable and very *sensible change made at once* when the soul is newborn ... yet the *sensible change is very gradual*.’ Here we have neither an equivocation nor a separation between regeneration and conversion. Instead, Edwards means that at the moment of regeneration the ‘sensible’ elements necessarily bound up in conversion (viz. humiliation, repentance, and faith) are exercised in a ‘reflex act’ of the Holy Spirit, and that, subsequently or gradually, the agent becomes sensible to the ‘great change made in the soul.’ A ‘habit of grace’ is, then,

always begun with an act of grace that shall imply faith in it, because a habit can be of no manner of use till there is occasion to exert it ...[Therefore] the first new thing that there can be in the creature must be some *actual alteration*.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> ‘M’364, *Works*18, 105.

<sup>44</sup> *Works*13, 357-58. All italics mine.



In the new birth the infusion of the new disposition is ‘always with an *act of grace*’, i.e. an exercise of faith, though a period of inactivity may follow this necessary initial act, depending on the sanctifying purposes and activities of God.

In Edwards’ soteriology the faith producing act of the Holy Spirit in regeneration brings together (a) and (b), so that conversion is instantaneous and occurs instantaneously with infusion. Such ideas are often repeated in his sermons and ‘M’. For instance in ‘M’673, Edwards teaches that, ‘conversion is a work that is done at once, and not gradually’ by the Spirit. In the same entry he underscores the instantaneousness of conversion as he equates it with effectual calling and regeneration: ‘There is something immediately put into their hearts at that call that is new, that there was nothing of before ... And that the work of conversion is wrought at once, is further evident by its being compared to a work of creation.’ Later he alludes to the Spirit’s faith producing act, as he plainly articulates his particularist position:

[C]onversion [is] an immediate and instantaneous work ... by which we must understand that [natural-men] have none of that kind of grace, or disposition.... Natural men, or those that are not savingly converted, have no degree of that principle from whence all gracious actings flow, viz. the Spirit of God, or of Christ ... because having *of the Spirit* is given as a sure sign of being in Christ.... Hereby ’tis evident that they have none of that holy principle that the godly have; and if they have nothing of the Spirit, they have nothing of those things that are the fruits of the Spirit.<sup>45</sup>

His whole point is to safeguard the doctrine of *solī Deo gloria* by insisting on an absolutely monergistic, irresistible, and supernatural conversion within a sinful subject. For Edwards, the Spirit’s faith producing act within a non-cooperative subject alleviates the aesthetic/relational tension that there should be the mutual act of each party (Christ/sinner) for a union. In his own words, there must be ‘consent on the part of both, each should receive the other, and actively join themselves to each other’.<sup>46</sup> Since ‘’tis an utter impossibility that ever man should do what is necessary in order to salvation, nor do the least towards it’, the Spirit Himself ‘takes up’ the faculties of man and irresistibly implants consenting faith. As he says in ‘M’632: faith ‘receives and accepts the gift, or is the person’s active uniting with the gift, with its qualities and relations, viz. as a free gift, the gift of God, the fruit of his power, etc.’<sup>47</sup> Or, in other words, to say that regeneration has occurred is to say that there is a union, and if a union, then consent or love must be mutually expressed. Contrary to Morimoto’s design, ‘The Spirit’, Edwards says, ‘[does] not do His work to the halves.’<sup>48</sup>

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By postponing the converting disposition’s exercise of faith, Morimoto runs counter to the most fundamental element of Edwards’ doctrine of regeneration, namely, ‘’Tis not only principles, *but especially acts*, that are the condition of salvation, for acts are the end of

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<sup>45</sup> *Works*18, 230, 231, 232, 233.

<sup>46</sup> ‘M’568, *Works*18, 105.

<sup>47</sup> ‘M’71 and 632, *Works*13 and *Works*18, 238, 159.

<sup>48</sup> ‘M’600, *Works*18, 200.



principles, and principles are in vain without 'em.'<sup>49</sup> Stoddard's successor had a number of ways of expressing it; Morimoto seems to have missed them all. Consider the following examples from the 'Miscellanies':

637. The Jews put circumcision instead of regeneration, instead of *that faith that is wrought in regeneration*, or instead of that righteousness of Christ that faith has or that is virtually in faith.

665. The very first effect of saving grace that touches the will is to abolish its resistance and incline the will ... *As soon as ever divine grace enters*, the man is willing.

675. The Spirit of God ... ingenerated the human nature of Christ; which is *a work to which conversion is compared*, which is an ingenerating Christ into the heart, as that was an ingenerating Christ in the womb [of Mary].

772. The Holy Spirit 'brings God to dwell with their souls on earth *in their conversion*.'<sup>50</sup>

Thus, it is certain in Edwards' soteriology that a sinner undergoes regeneration, union, conversion, and therefore justification on the first and necessary act of faith wrought by the Spirit at the point of infusion. (The whole 'Seventh Sign' in *Religious Affections* is devoted to conversion as regeneration.)<sup>51</sup> On this point, the difference between Edwards and his tradition cannot be more than marginal. Calvinism was inclined to portray converting grace through faith as irresistible, with the result that conversion became a virtually spontaneous turning of the one who was elected-called-regenerated to receive grace. The teaching in Northampton was the same as in Westminster, or Geneva for that matter.

Edwards' problems with infant salvation are always teleological; that God may regenerate an infant soul with all the affectional elements concomitant with converting graces is no difficulty at all – it is all the work of the Spirit of Christ. But how God gets His glory perceived and acknowledged (replicated) through infants Edwards finds perplexing. Hence his willingness to discuss 'conversion' as *both an event and a process* – just as his Reformed theological mentors had taught for generations.<sup>52</sup>

#### **1.d. *What is real, the basis of what is legal***

When it comes to the doctrine of justification, Edwards allows no room for synergism or neonomianism. He even disapproves of calling faith 'the instrument wherewith we receive justification' for fear of making it man's contribution to salvation.<sup>53</sup> Not that he repudiates Calvin's definition of faith, it is just that he, like other Reformed theologians, thought it wise to neutralize the suggestion of causality in faith's instrumentality.

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<sup>49</sup> 'M'800, *Works*18, 500. Emphasis mine.

<sup>50</sup> *Works*18, 167, 211, 236, 422. All italics mine.

<sup>51</sup> *Works*2, 340-44.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. Perkins, *Armilla Aurea* (Cambridge, 1590), *Workes Perkins*, 1:2-120; Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:15-17, 501-724; and Owen on 'Justification', *The Works Of John Owen*, vol. 5, ed. Wm. Goold.

<sup>53</sup> 'Justification by Faith Alone' (1734), *Banner-Works*, 1:624.



Morimoto, however, while arguing that Edwards retains a ‘Protestant character’ to his doctrine of justification, makes the author of the anti-Arminian lectures *Justification by Faith Alone* (1738)<sup>54</sup> not only Arminian but semi-Pelagian in his treatment of conversion and justification. In a section labeled ‘Human Goodness Prior to Justification’, Morimoto argues that in Edwards’ soteriology unconverted persons possess ‘inherent goodness’ which ‘becomes “acceptable” and “rewardable” only after justification.’<sup>55</sup> His point is that unconverted persons may be regenerate and yet have no union with Christ. For Morimoto, it is by the inherent gracious disposition men now possess, that they put their ‘rewardable’ faith in Christ and ‘play their own part in this mutual act of “union.”’<sup>56</sup> In brief, the regenerate soul that encounters certain disposition activating means exercises faith, the result of which establishes a union, a Spirit assisted conversion, and the pronouncement of justification. For this reason Morimoto says with Thomas Schafer, ‘there is nothing that keeps Edwards from becoming a Roman Catholic except for his rejection of the concept of merit.’<sup>57</sup>

‘M’364 or, alternatively, 568, factors largely in Morimoto’s anomalous account. The key passage he employs is one that many commentators have thought compromising to Edwards’ confessional position. The passage, repeated verbatim in both entries, is as follows:

What is real in the union between Christ and his people, is the foundation of what is legal; that is, it is something that is really in them and between them, uniting [them], that is the ground of the suitableness of their being accounted as one by the Judge.<sup>58</sup>

Morimoto starts off well by identifying ‘what is real’ or what it is that constitutes the ‘fitness’ or ‘suitableness’ of the union between ‘Christ and his people’ as *consent*. No compromise here. But there he stops in his analysis and turns the discussion to the active role human beings provide in mutual consent for their justification: ‘[Edwards] defines faith as that which constitutes a union with Christ, providing the faithful with an ontological foundation for “their being accounted as one [with Christ] by the judge.”’<sup>59</sup>

Noticeably absent from Morimoto’s account, however, is any mention of the Holy Spirit or whether the framework from which Edwards speaks is a temporal or eternal recognition of ontological union. As a matter of fact, in his thirty-page chapter on ‘Justification: God’s Crowning of His Own Gift’ the only reference to the Spirit belongs to a quote from W.G.T.

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<sup>54</sup> In 1734 JE preached a two-unit lecture on justification (Rom. 4:5) that was published in 1738 as *Justification by Faith Alone*. The published version was significantly revised and expanded from the original lectures. Prompted by the famous ‘Robert Breck Controversy’ and William Rand’s (minister at Sunderland) reportedly aberrant doctrine of justification, JE endeavors to oppose ‘the Arminian scheme of justification by our own virtue’ (*Banner-Works*, 1:621).

<sup>55</sup> *Catholic Vision*, 93.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 130; Schafer, ‘Jonathan Edwards and Justification by Faith’, 61.

<sup>58</sup> *Works* 18, 105.

<sup>59</sup> *Catholic Vision*, 90f: 85-86.



Shedd on secondary sanctification, and not a single sentence is provided to substantiate Morimoto's claim that the union God recognizes as justifying occurs within time. To exclude the Spirit and the *eternal context* in this matter could not deviate further from Edwards' thinking. For him, the ontological basis for forensic imputation, i.e. the transaction of Christ's faith and righteousness to the believer, fundamentally concerns the Spirit in an eternal arrangement. Indeed, in Edwards' soteriology, if the topic is faith, love or consent, *especially mutual consent*, then these ideas must be understood in terms of the Spirit; and the forensic arrangement for justification must be understood against the background of its eternal context, namely, the eternal 'confederation', the *pactum salutis*.<sup>60</sup>

What is real in the union between Christ and his people, which is the foundation of what is legal *qua* imputation and justification? Answer: mutual consent – or love, the 'greatest' and 'highest excellency', which, when between two spirits, *is* the Holy Spirit.<sup>61</sup> Thus, it is 'suitable' that God should account that which He constitutes to be 'united' to His triune Self, through the Spirit, just as it were the Son; or, which is to say the same thing, to reckon that 'Christ's satisfaction and righteousness should be theirs, because Christ and they are so united that they may be well looked upon as one.'<sup>62</sup> One could emphasize the '*as one*', for in his forensic thinking the ontological union that provides 'the foundation' of justification does *not* take place in the temporal sphere—i.e. there is no infusion of grace—logically prior to a declaration of righteous. Instead, in the eternal confederation, God's constituting the union with Christ and His Church provides the basis for an antecedent declaration of righteous, which, in turn, provides the efficient cause of the temporal union via regeneration. For this reason Edwards says that, in a certain sense, even the unregenerate elect have a legal right to Christ's benefits as a wife is entitled to that which belongs to her husband; for the Spirit Himself, who, in God's constituting a union between the sinner and the Son, is the 'union' – the Spirit belongs to them legally because He does really. God, as it were, regards the Spirit 'purchased' by the Son *as the mutual consent or actual union* between the sinner and the Son, and therefore imputes righteousness to the sinner on account of what Son has procured for them – the Spirit:<sup>63</sup> for when the Son 'purchased' the Spirit for His bride, He also 'purchased faith and conversion' for them in the Spirit.<sup>64</sup> In Edwards, then, the *ordo salutis* may be discussed in terms of eternal arrangement and constitution, as well as the logical ordering of temporal applications—this, too, was in keeping with his Reformed tradition.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>60</sup> 'Sermon One', *Works*9, 117, 119 1Peter 1:19 (1738/9, 1753, 1756), 3.

<sup>61</sup> 'The Mind' 1 and 45, *Works*6, 336-38, 362-66.

<sup>62</sup> 'M'568, *Works*18, 105.

<sup>63</sup> 'M'755, *Works*18, 403-04. See also 'M'507, 568, 627 and 712 in *Works*18.

<sup>64</sup> 'M'1159 [TS Beinecke]. Also, in the 'Table to the "Miscellanies"', JE lists under the heading 'Christ' a subsection denominated 'Purchased Faith and Conversion' (*Works*13, 127).

<sup>65</sup> From the time Calvin first published his *Institutes* in 1536, Reformation theologians and ministers quickly latched onto the method of communicating and explaining the scope and particulars of soteriology, in both objectively dogmatic or subjectively applied and appropriated terminologies, by an



What, then, is the faith that unites man to Christ in the *actual moment* of salvation? A communication or manifestation of the Spirit of Christ. Understood in a way conscious of the contexts within which Edwards considers the legal and ontological dimensions of salvation, faith no more becomes a synergistic exercise than infusion, though, to be sure, the faculties of man are ‘taken up’ in temporal ‘union’. Discussions about ‘the ground of *suitableness*’ (Edwards’ aesthetic substitute for ‘*condition*’) and ‘acts of faith’ in justification, therefore, immediately pertain to the Person of the Spirit, not ‘Human Goodness Prior to Justification.’

### 1.d.i. *Virtual Faith/Real Savior*

In numerous places Edwards explains that there is a twofold fitness to the human state, one moral the other natural. An agent is morally fit for a state, when by his ‘excellency or odiousness his excellency or odiousness commends him to it.’ The aesthetic arbiter ‘suitable’ coordinates an agent’s excellency with a ‘good state’ or, conversely, odiousness with an ‘ill state’. Once again, the theme of Spirit ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ is repeated.<sup>66</sup> He accepts the former as belonging to the believer but rejects the latter. This is because a ‘moral suitableness’ always includes a ‘natural’, but the natural ‘by no means necessarily includes a moral.’<sup>67</sup> Union with Christ establishes a ‘natural suitableness’, i.e. it fulfills the ‘condition’, so that justification need not flow out of a ‘moral suitableness’. Which is to say, human acts never have by nature a virtue or merit that God respects. Herein lies the difference between the Calvinist and the Arminian, between Jonathan Edwards and, say, Charles G. Finney.

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*ordo salutis* – the systematic ordering of the various elements in the biblical concept of salvation from either the perspective of the Divine (eternally viewing the whole to particulars) or personally (as subjectively applied and appropriated). While later Medieval theologians generally described an ‘order’ in temporal or sequential terms in accordance with salvation’s ecclesiastical (sacramental) connection, the ‘order’ of Reformation theologians stressed a logical, not a chronological explication. Although certain unavoidable temporal implications seemed to be implied in their systematic ordering, their insistence upon the instantaneousness of a unitary conversion ‘process’/‘experience’ was intended not only to preserve divine sovereignty in the matter but also to contain potential misunderstandings of the *ordo* as a recipe to redemption. Indeed, conversion occurs as ‘event’, yet the moment of regeneration, for them, may elude a predetermined sequence of observable phenomena. During the period between 1600 and 1720 there were numerous variations within the different presentations of the *ordo*, yet, with few exceptions, controversies within the Calvinist tradition were generally unassuming. Calvin gave a pastoral and systematic expression to regenerating grace and justifying righteousness in Christ in *Institutes*, III. Advancing Calvin’s work, Reformed soteriology sought to take for its point of origin the eternal union established in the *pactum salutis* between the Son and those whom the Father has given Him, in virtue of which there is an eternal imputation of the righteousness of Christ to those who are covenantally His. Focusing on the application of redemption to the elect, these theologians would move from the sphere of the eternal *pactum* to the temporal realm and continue the *ordo* with justification, regeneration or ‘effectual’ calling, and thus accentuate the fact that, from its incipiency to fruition, the application of Christ’s redemptive benefits was a sovereign work of God. See, O. Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*; Ferguson, ‘Ordo Salutis’, *New Dictionary of Theology*; Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.2.

<sup>66</sup> JE articulates essentially the same principles in volitional terms within *FW*.

<sup>67</sup> ‘M’712, *Works*18, 341.



Where ‘moral fitness’ serves the basis of justification for Arminians, ‘natural fitness’ is for Edwards. The means to justification by ‘natural fitness’ is faith: that is, faith alone; faith as consent; faith as the ‘condition’ between the believer and Christ; faith as the Spirit of Christ.

‘Natural fitness’ also is the vehicle of imputation – another doctrine rejected by the Arminians as ‘legal fiction’. How could Christ’s righteousness, in the moment of justification, be transferred to an agent by nature unworthy to receive it? ‘Natural fitness’ places the orthodox response on more sure grounds than the traditional forensic explanation. As Ava Chamberlain explains, ‘The concept of natural fitness emphasizes that imputation is preceded by a preexisting union with Christ ... Because the union with Christ, which occurs by faith, creates the ontological foundation necessary for imputation, it is fitting that the faithful are justified.’<sup>68</sup> Thus Edwards says, ‘God sees it fit that they only that are one with Christ by their own act, should be looked upon as one in law.’<sup>69</sup>

By virtue of the believer’s union with Christ by the Spirit (in faith/consent)—something real in the eternal sphere and realized in temporality—he/she becomes the possessor of all the righteousness, holiness, faith and love of Christ.<sup>70</sup> Justification by faith/union with Christ is immediate, perfect, and inalienable – as long as the union holds, which, according to God’s eternal covenantal purposes and promises, it will forever. To be sure, what is real in the union is the basis of what is legal.

But how does the union hold in a temporal context when there is no express consent? That is, if the believer ceases to believe at any point in time, what would be the ground of his/her justification? As John H. Gerstner asks, ‘Would it not be better to say that he will be justified if he continues as he now is?’<sup>71</sup>

Keenly aware of these questions—especially in lieu of their relevance to the Connecticut Valley revival and its aftermath, when many, even in his own Northampton congregation, ‘cooled’ in their religious affections and exercises—Edwards sought for a way to articulate the importance of a faith that *perseveres*, even when parishioners did not. But this created a dilemma for him: a persevering faith, according to his reading of the Scriptures, is not dormant but active. His tradition reconciled Luther’s difficulty with The Epistle of James by asserting that St. James and St. Paul were in complete agreement: faith alone justifies, but it is an active faith. Not only is ‘True Grace Distinguished from the Experience of Devils’ in terms of ‘true’ religious affections but also accompanying performance.<sup>72</sup> Hence, Edwards reasoned that, if conversion brings a ‘very great change to the soul’, then along with persevering faith there ought to be persevering Christian practice in the religious life. In other words, a

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<sup>68</sup> ‘EI’, *Works* 18, 17.

<sup>69</sup> ‘M’ 568, *Works* 18, 105. Cf. ‘M’ 709.

<sup>70</sup> *Banner-Works*, 1:627. Cf. ‘M’ 1250 and 1354 [TS Beinecke].

<sup>71</sup> *Rational Biblical*, 3:202.

<sup>72</sup> (1752), *Banner-Works*, 2:41f.



persevering faith leaves ‘distinguishing marks’. As his critical analysis of the awakenings and so-called ‘communion controversy’ make certain, Edwards found mere ‘profession’ highly suspect. Whether in a four-year-old child like Phoebe Bartlett or a seasoned ecclesiastic like Stoddard, conversion *really* alters a person. So the tension was this: on the one hand, Edwards reasoned that hypocrites have no claim to either congregational privileges or eternal life; while on the other hand, he was fully conscious of the frailty of the human condition and that justification in no way depends on the individual but on Christ. Faith, then, if it is the faith Christ grants, must overcome; it must endure. But how, since the evidence of its presence in the believer, as the Great Awakening proved, wildly fluxes and quickly wanes?

The difficulty of striking a balance is remarkable: antinomianism, neonomianism, nominalism, and legalism are all to be avoided, while at the same time there is the reality of *simil iustus ac peccator* to contend with. Edwards finds an innovative solution by proposing a theological doctrine that did not rest upon an evaluation of one’s own ‘works’, but Christ’s: he (1) grounds initial justification in the conditional ‘first act of faith’; and (2) also makes the status of ‘justified’ conditional upon perseverance; but then (3) declares that Christ has actually persevered in faith and practice for the believer.

For though a sinner is justified on his first act of faith, yet even then, in that act of justification, God has respect to perseverance, as being virtually in that first act; and ’tis looked upon as if it were a property of the faith, and sinner is justified by that, as though it already were, because by divine establishment it shall follow.<sup>73</sup>

According to Edwards, the first act of faith gives a ‘title’ to salvation, because it does, virtually at least, ‘trust in God and Christ for perseverance among other benefits, and gives a title to this benefit with others, and so virtually contains perseverance.’<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, this is nothing more than what nineteen-year-old Jonathan Edwards wrote in ‘M’y:

Christ has already acted on the part of those that believe, and those merits are sure and certain that he has purchased. So that although Adam could fall, [it] is no argument that we may. For what Adam was to be made happy for was not yet performed; but our is, and that fully.<sup>75</sup>

Salvation is, therefore, in itself sure and certain after the first faith-act of consent, not because justification’s futurity is certain *in itself*, for, as Edwards writes, ‘that is as certain in itself by the divine decree,’ but because the faith-act establishes a congruity between salvation and the subject. Chamberlain describes the implications of Edwards’ reconditioning the doctrine of justification:

By insisting that the ‘sinner is justified on his first act of faith,’ Edwards avoids the Arminian view ‘that the act of justification should be suspended, till the sinner had persevered in faith.’ But he elevates the status of perseverance by asserting that faith ‘virtually contains’ perseverance,

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<sup>73</sup> ‘M’729, *Works*18, 354.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>75</sup> *Works*13, 176.



which ‘God has respect to’ and looks ‘upon as if it were a property of faith, by which the sinner is then justified’ (No. 729). This concept of ‘virtual perseverance’ clearly exposes the limits of the orthodox doctrine of justification.<sup>76</sup>

*Actual perseverance* on the part of the believer does not justify, indeed, it is impossible for those who are *simil peccator*. But because Christ ‘has *actually persevered* through the greatest imaginable trials’, and the believer stands in ‘actual union of the soul with Christ’, then ‘we shall stand and persevere in him’ for He ‘persevered not only for himself, but for us.’<sup>77</sup> Thus, when Edwards speaks of ‘virtual’ faith or righteousness or perseverance, he does not mean dormant, but complete in Christ, complete in our union with Him by the Spirit: which things, due to the ‘fittingness’ of God’s ordering of redemption, as well as His plan for self-glorification, outwardly manifest themselves via the ‘new spiritual sense’. The Spirit, as that new spiritual sense or disposition of love to God, is given by Christ not just to regenerate, but to rule and reign. Consequently, we find that time and again Edwards both comforts his auditors with words of assurance, ‘Christ has accomplished all’, and warns that ‘Persons ought not to rest ignorant and unresolved about their own state, whether they be real Christians or no.’<sup>78</sup> ‘Justified’ is not only the *real* legal status of absolved and righteous, but the *reality* of a vital union with Christ through a Divine Person who is ‘pure act’.<sup>79</sup>

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Without question, Edwards’ soteriology is a complex labyrinth fraught with a variety of theological innovations, of which we have here considered only a few. But these innovations, as well as his whole theory of salvation, clearly show affinity with Geneva and Westminster’s emphasis on ‘union with Christ’, rather than the emphases characteristic of Rome and Trent. So while Morimoto may be right to say that Edwards espouses a Lombardian soteriology of ontological transformation, yet he wrongly superimposes a Thomist and Tridentine template onto it; the result of which leaves much of Edwards’ telic-theocentrism neglected and his philosophy of dispositions misappropriated.

In Edwards, neither a prior infusion of grace or holiness is the basis of justification, nor, as John Henry Newman taught, is the declaration itself renewing/creative. Rather, the divinely constituted union—*that which is real in God’s estimation*—is the foundation of what is legal.

Within New England Theology, it was not Jonathan Edwards but Samuel Hopkins’ ‘New Divinity’ that separated conversion and regeneration. Hopkins, unlike Edwards, carefully distinguished in salvation between ‘regeneration’, which he saw as totally the work of the Spirit, and ‘conversion’, the active, volitional exercise of the human will which leads to holiness. Thus, within the ‘New Divinity’ system, one could be chosen by God and still play

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<sup>76</sup> ‘EI’, *Works* 18, 38.

<sup>77</sup> ‘M’ 695, *Works* 18, 276-81.

<sup>78</sup> 2Cor. 13:5 (173[5?]).

<sup>79</sup> ‘An Essay on the Trinity’, *Treatise*, 108.



the major role in one's conversion.<sup>80</sup> In contrast to the impression one gets from Morimoto, this was a departure from Edwards' theology not an expression of it.

## 2. *A Strange, New Edwards?*

Despite the problematic content of Morimoto's interpretations, Gerald McDermott adopts the thesis that Edwards indeed separated regeneration and conversion, and did so because his theology was becoming ever more inclusivistic. In *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, Professor McDermott advances Morimoto's work through a presentation of 'A Strange, New Edwards';<sup>81</sup> one that was exercised by the 'scandal' of traditional Christian particularism and set out to show the deists of his day that non-Christian religions of the world also encased 'the most important truths of Christianity'.<sup>82</sup>

Where, on the one hand, Morimoto said that a gracious disposition was 'all that was necessary for salvation' but still maintained a distinction between those justified Christians who had their gracious disposition (mechanically) activated through contact with converting, *Christian* 'means and ordinances'; McDermott, on the other hand, while in fundamental agreement that 'The inner disposition, not any particular acts and exercises, is the only essential prerequisite to salvation',<sup>83</sup> nevertheless suggests that Christian 'means and ordinances', i.e. the gospel of Christ and its accompaniments, are *not* necessary for the conversion of the 'heathen' soul – there is enough non-Christian revelation in the world to 'trigger', as it were, the disposition and justify the religiously or philosophically inclined.

This, according to McDermott, was all part of Edwards' progressive philosophy of history, a history that envisioned the world moving toward a millennial era of 'true religion', the kingdom of God on earth, in which all with a gracious disposition would be converted. 'True religion', but not necessarily the *Christian faith*, would reign on earth.

A pluralistic if not universalistic Edwards would indeed be 'A Strange, New Edwards.' Yet, as the preceding section illustrates, Edwards' soteriology hardly suits an inclusivistic Edwards, let alone a pluralistic or universalistic one.

What then are we to make of Edwards' sixty or more 'Miscellanies' entries on 'heathen religions' and pagan sages, to which McDermott draws our attention?<sup>84</sup> And what role did non-Christian religions play within his philosophy of history?

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<sup>80</sup> Hopkins' blend of Calvinism with revivalism became known as 'Hopkinsianism', his chief contribution to the 'New Divinity'. See his lecture on John 1:13 'Regeneration and Conversion' reproduced in *Introduction to Puritan Theology*, ed. Hindson, 180f.

<sup>81</sup> *Confronts the Gods*, 3.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>84</sup> Seven (of ten) MS 'M' notebooks (nos. 4, 5, 7, 8, 9[a], 9[b], and 9[c]) from JE's corpus contain literally hundreds of folio pages of notes on non-Christian religions and 'HEATHEN PHILOSOPHERS'.



## 2.a. The Context: Enlightenment Religion

McDermott exhibits considerable erudition in his account of the deist challenge to the limitations of Christian peculiarity. John Toland, Matthew Tindal, Thomas Chubb, and other deists, with some of whom Edwards was well acquainted,<sup>85</sup> concentrated on issues of goodness and justice and, consequently, the nature of God and His relation to rational beings. As McDermott aptly states it, ‘For it was finally a debate about the relationship between “natural religion” based on abstract principles and “revealed religion,” said to be rooted in the religious experience recorded in Scripture.’<sup>86</sup> For Enlightenment freethinkers, the widely celebrated Newtonian paradigm offered a new, efficient world emancipated from the divine panopticon. This coupled with avant-garde Lockean philosophy, in which Locke established the maxim that ‘Nothing that is contrary to, and inconsistent with the clear and self-evident Dictates of Reason, has a right to be urged, or assented to, as a Matter of Faith’,<sup>87</sup> only served to embolden deists toward the consideration that even the restrictivist parameters of salvation dogma could be radically reassessed. This, of course, would have only been in keeping with the Cambridge Platonists, who fortified the belief that unaccompanied human reason was sufficient to recognize and appropriate divine truths to its own eternal benefit.<sup>88</sup>

For deists like Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Toland, and Tindal, the traditional Christian notions of revelation and salvation through Jesus Christ *alone* were unjust to the vast portion of humanity. Consequently, time-honored doctrines surrounding Christ’s substitutionary atonement and propitiatory sacrifice, and especially the distinguishing tenets of Calvinism, were repudiated *in toto*. Likewise, the Judaeo-Christian monopoly on revelation was not contested and evenly distributed among the world’s religions, but made redundant in its entirety. ‘*Natural religion*’ supplanted revealed religion for Enlightenment thinkers: God spoke to all peoples through nature and reason. As reports from merchants, explorers, adventurers, and scholars poured forth details, controversialists told of scores of non-Christianized civilizations whose morality eclipsed their ‘sophisticated’ Western counterparts. By arguing that Greco-Roman mythology and philosophy, as well as highly ethical non-Christian religions, were *self-contrived*, *self-defined*, and *successful*, or, in other words, that pagan perspicacity and ‘heathen’ religious systems developed civilized ethical worldviews

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Perhaps the first entry specifically designated to this genre is ‘M’953 (c.1742), while the last ‘M’1359 was composed shortly before the commencement of his presidency at Princeton (Jan. 1758).

<sup>85</sup> JE refers to Tindal in ‘M’1337, cites his *Christian as Old as Creation* in 1340, and certainly alludes to him whenever on the issue of ‘deistical religion’. Chubb, of course, is a key polemical target in *FW*.

<sup>86</sup> *Confronts the Gods*, 18-19.

<sup>87</sup> *Essay*, bk. IV, 18, 6. In *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), Locke furthers the thesis that revealed religion must be subjected to the judgment of reason. Moreover, in his *Letters Concerning Toleration* (London, 1689/92), Locke attempted to imbed historical revelation and the proof of its reasonableness in the general system of rationality.

<sup>88</sup> Whichcote, *Aphorisms*, 74-77. Compare McDermott, *Confronts the Gods*, 22.



independent from biblical revelation, the deists not only naturalized religion but negated the Christian necessity for divine revelation – along with its particularist message.

In short, according to the deist God *had* provided a mediator for all mankind when He created man with reason to direct his behavior and beliefs. Therefore an incarnate Redeemer was superfluous at best, repugnant at worst. To quote McDermott, ‘for the deists, particularity and goodness were mutually exclusive terms.’<sup>89</sup> If God was good, He was fair; and nothing was fairer than living by the light of reason and nature, no matter where on earth one dwelt, nor when one did so. The ‘true religion’ of the world was, therefore, *ahistorical* and *acultural*; it was natural – the product of the moral character of the heart directed by universal reason.

### **2.b. Edwards’ Rejoinder**

Enlightenment religion found revelation the epistemological chink in Christianity’s armor, and history, the deists believed, substantiated their position. Edwards himself quickly perceived that the issue with ‘the more considerable Deists’ was not so much ontological and aetiological, as it had been with Hobbes and Mandeville, but epistemological and moral – recurring themes in the philosophy of history.<sup>90</sup> The burning issue over the will, of course, was foundational to the deist scheme: self-determination empowered humanity to attain to ‘true religion’ without revelation or supernatural grace. A chief reason why Edwards attacked the basis of Arminian thought was that it accommodated deistic principles and provided, as Paul Ramsey put it, ‘the breach through which deism poured, [to] the abandonment of Christianity.’<sup>91</sup> In essence, Arminian theology put the power of salvation in the hands of the individual; it personalized salvation and made it readily available by de-emphasizing localized Christian ‘means and ordinances’, i.e. the gospel revealed through word, sacrament, and sacred community. As the deists saw it, self-determination was ‘divinity’s greatest gift to humanity’;<sup>92</sup> their doctrines helped to vindicate, before the eyes of Europeans, the religious practices of the heathen, who, though historically and culturally isolated from institutionalized Christian means, nevertheless possessed that universal religious ability of self-determination.

Edwards determined that deism’s infiltration into Christian orthodoxy or, rather, orthodoxy’s mutation into deism occurred by three subtle steps, culminating in a decisive fourth: (1) an aberrant opinion of man’s mental (i.e. reasoning and volitional) abilities; (2) an extra-biblical appraisal of man’s moral propensities and constitution; (3) a homocentric worldview leading to a naturalistic moral philosophy; and (4) open and unforgivable apostasy.

Having determined the priority of the issues to be addressed, he began his calculated attack with *Freedom of the Will*, a treatise aimed to demolish the ‘idol of free will’ and

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<sup>89</sup> McDermott, *Confronts the Gods*, 51.

<sup>90</sup> *TV, Works*8, 541.

<sup>91</sup> ‘EI’, *Works*1, 69.

<sup>92</sup> McDermott, *Confronts the Gods*, 33.



destabilize the mechanism by which deistic principles were propagated within the Church, viz. Arminian theology.<sup>93</sup> Next came *Original Sin*, which at its heart proposed to show, by reason, empirical observation, and Scripture, that man is not by nature innately good (another pillar of Enlightenment religion) but inherently sinful. This was a clarion call in support of an authentically Christian anthropology (and corresponding soteriology), as well as elenctic exposé of Taylor's heretical model of Christianity-as-deism.

*Two Dissertations* was the adroit polemic against the third phase of deist ideology. And here is where Edwards intends to reclaim world history from the deist camp, namely, through an opposing theocentric worldview that proposed the two-pronged thesis: '[God] makes himself his end' in creation; and God is a communicating being.<sup>94</sup> Thus,

While deists condemned God to silence outside the secret dictates of the inner mind, Edwards proclaimed that God was ever communicating, and through many and diverse media—not only through Scripture but also through nature, history, and the history of religions.<sup>95</sup>

God's ultimate end in creation includes innumerable subordinate ends that envelop every thing, person, and moment in world history, a history in which the vestiges of revelation remains with every culture and time, to greater or lesser degrees. Of course, neither *End of Creation* nor *True Virtue* explicitly bears this out, but his unwritten *magnum opus*, which he in fact named *A History of the Work of Redemption*, would have done so.<sup>96</sup>

There were four central points to make in the appeal to history. First, contrary to the deist claim that pagan wisdom and non-Christian religious systems largely developed independent of revelation, Edwards' counterarguments were intended to show that both Greco-Roman philosophies and heathen religions were in fact dependent upon revelation.<sup>97</sup> Secondly, he intended to provide opposing evidence from the same historical theatre as the freethinkers concerning the sufficiency of human reason (and will) to uncover the true God. Thirdly, he meant to show that the deists were asking the wrong questions – 'true religion' was not *primarily* about morality but doxology: 'true virtue' was a consequence of 'true doxology'; both of which were revelatory items. And fourthly, over-against the Enlightenment accusation that Christianity – especially Christian dogma – was static thinking of antiquity, Jonathan Edwards asserted that Christian eschatology was fused with history – which was not static – it was moving toward a telic goal. The history of the deists was neither outside nor above the

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<sup>93</sup> *FW* also had the aim to buttress the Calvinist theory of reprobation, as the conclusion suggests.

<sup>94</sup> *EofC*, *Works*8, 437; '*M*'332, *Works*13, 410.

<sup>95</sup> McDermott, *Confronts the Gods*, 43.

<sup>96</sup> See Michael J. McClymond's intriguing essay 'If There Had Been No Vaccination', where he suggests that the evidence in JE's letters links the unwritten project to such works as *HWR*, *EofC*, and the '*M*'. Though the proposed treatise bears the same name as the published 1739 sermon series, it was not to be the same sort of 'history', but a body of divinity 'thrown into the form of an history ... in an entire [sic] new method', i.e. the traditional content of Protestant theology chronologically developed in conjunction with sacred and profane history (*Works*16, 727). Cf. Minkema, 'The Other Unfinished "Great Work"' in *JE's Writings*, 52-65; and Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the America People*, 310.

<sup>97</sup> McDermott, *Confronts the Gods*, 38-39.



linear progression of biblical history. The movement of history belongs the YHWY and the fate of the deists and those who sympathized with their worldview is tethered to Christ's bilateral redemptive and apocalyptic reed. We consider each point in turn.

### 2.b.i. *The 'Trickle-Down' Effect*

McDermott's research to substantiate Edwards' first point remains unprecedented and comprehensive. Quotes are furnished from dozens of 'Miscellanies' entries, as he evidences Edwards' contentions:

Contrary to what freethinkers say, [Edwards] charges, philosophy has given little or no knowledge of the true God, and what true knowledge existed among the heathen had come from revelation (*Misc* 986). The history of religion is a history of degradation, decline, and the corruption of an original pure deposit of revelation (*Misc* 986).<sup>98</sup>

The heathen, according to Edwards, received their wisdom and knowledge of God not through 'natural religion', reason and nature alone, 'but by tradition from revelation given to the fathers of their nations.'<sup>99</sup> Thus, in addition to the conventional Calvinistic appeal to divine general revelation, Edwards also appropriated the so-called *prisca theologia*, a theory propounded for example by Theophilus Gale in his multi-volume *Court of the Gentiles* (1669-77) and Hugo Grotius' influential *De Jure Belli et Pacis* (1625), which in principle taught that God's special revelation 'by TRADITION from the first ages of the world and from the Jewish nation' ('*M*' 1020), trickled-down to ancient Greece and Rome, India and Africa, and even to China and the Americas. The idea was to demonstrate that every major thinker from Socrates and Plato to every leading religion from Islam and Confucianism to the animism of the Iroquois and Delaware Indians were indebted to God's special oral (and transcribed) revelation to Adam, the line of Seth, the Patriarchs, and, particularly, Moses' Pentateuch.

In his refusal to concede the point that five-sixths of the world has been left without revelation, that is, to grant that God is unfair, Edwards, as McDermott explains, 'insisted that human beings before the advent of Christ and outside the borders of Christian nations were not and are not deprived of revelation, as the deists claimed, but have been fairly inundated with the voice of God'.<sup>100</sup> If the divine revelation filtered down through ancient sources—which provided true knowledge of God and sundry other items of divinity—were not enough, the heathens also possess ever-present typological forms in nature, history, and circumstances, as well as their consciences, to educate them beyond the light of reason.<sup>101</sup>

His strategy to portray the history of the work of redemption as 'a series of revelations by God to the heathen'<sup>102</sup> proved its point against the deists, even if many of his sources were

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>101</sup> See Fiering, *Moral Thought*, c.2: 'The Moral Achievements of "Natural Understanding"'.  
<sup>102</sup> McDermott, *Confronts the Gods*, 103.



unverifiable or simply erroneous.<sup>103</sup> God did not ‘lock out’ the heathens, but blessed them with enough light to glorify and thank Him, in addition to providing them with wisdom for societal living. Therefore, says McDermott, ‘In Edwards’s new history God was still good, in the context of the new knowledge of pluralism, because knowledge of God the Redeemer had been available from the beginning.’<sup>104</sup>

### 2.b.ii. *Because of Reason, Revelation is Necessary*

According to Edwards, the deists had it backwards: history did not show the sufficiency but the deficiency and futility of human reason (and will) to provide true knowledge of God. Certainly there were qualitative similarities between Judaeo-Christianity and Plato’s ‘The One’ or Plotinus’ ‘The Good’<sup>105</sup> or even the conceptual and moral thought of non-Christian religions – such was the inevitable residual result of prior revelation; but the dogmatic expression and praxis of pagan philosophers and heathen religions were, in the words of McDermott, ‘just so many manifestations of the human proclivity to deny and distort the original revelations given to the fathers of the nations.’<sup>106</sup>

Edwards’ theory of reason argues in ‘M’1338 that its sufficiency in religion lies only in the ability to ‘confirm’ the reasonableness of an idea *p* already discovered but is generally incapable of ascertaining *p* to start with. The reason heathens were/are not Jews or have become Christians is because they have largely perverted, suppressed and ignored God’s progressive revelation to them. So far from advancing mankind in terms of true religious knowledge, natural-man’s reason and will have been the foremost impediments.

The issue again becomes one of dispositions – the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’. Only this time, conscious of the Enlightenment – à la Lockean – challenge to allow ‘Nothing that is contrary to ... clear and self-evident Dictates of Reason ... as a Matter of Faith’ (i.e. the validity of revealed truths must be confirmed by reason), Edwards sets forth his powerful apology concerning the epistemic access *regenerate* as opposed to *unregenerate* reason possesses, the thesis concerning the ‘new spiritual sense’. He makes the issue not one of hardware (his doctrine of natural ability stipulates that the rational mind is fully capable of speculative knowledge of God), but software: the unregenerate can ‘agree’ with the notional reasoning of believers, but they can never sense, feel, or appreciate its truth or reality; ‘for the

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<sup>103</sup> On the whole, JE was without recourse to verify the historical accuracy of his sources concerning non-Christian religions, many which were flawed. And, so, he took them as practically reliable. More accessible, however, were the ancient classics texts at Harvard and Yale. But it seems JE was little interested in devoting time to confirm the (at times, incorrect) claims of Gale, Grotius, Cudworth, Chevalier Ramsey, Samuel Bochart, and others, whom he cited regarding pagan wisdom and mythology. His motives were not those of a historiographer but of a theologian. Thus, he was source-sensitive only in terms of the didactic potential of a historical text’s content.

<sup>104</sup> *Confronts the Gods*, 103.

<sup>105</sup> Re: Plato, see ‘M’955; Neoplatonism, ‘M’970; and ‘M’992 on Plotinus [TS Beinecke].

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 88. See Amos 8:11 (1729).



disposition ... must necessarily be changed first.’<sup>107</sup> For the unregenerate a disposition of ‘holy consent’—spiritual sensibilities to the aesthetic dimension of reality—remains entirely lacking. Consequently, the heathen abide in ‘darkness in religious things’.<sup>108</sup> The difference between unregenerate and regenerate reason leveled the epistemic playing field: reason has warped boundaries; revelation is necessary.

So heathen all over the world were given enough light to enjoy true religion—if they would only take advantage of it ... The heathen usually did not have the right disposition to ‘improve their advantages,’ but Edwards had proven his point. Despite the postponement of the Messiah’s coming until thousands of years after the Creation, knowledge of true religion was nevertheless available during those years, and not only to the Jews. So Edwards’s fairly traditional chronology could still stand against deist charges of injustice and cruelty. His God was vindicated.<sup>109</sup>

### **2.b.iii. *A New Historical Agenda: The Wrong Answer to the Right Question***

It is only when we get to the third point of Edwards’ alternative representation of history that McDermott’s otherwise valuable and scholarly study disappoints by suggesting a soteriological agenda for Edwards essentially irreconcilable with the whole character of his Calvinistic thought and corpus. However remarkable it may be that Edwards, on the outskirts of the New World frontier, privately amassed data on every religious item from the activities of the Pope to the writings of Muhammad in order to develop an elaborate scheme for the roles other religions had and were playing in the drama of redemption, he was not pursuing an alternative salvation scheme for the ‘heathen’, as McDermott proposes.<sup>110</sup>

When Edwards sets worship as the focal point of ‘true religion’ he offers an option opposite to the deists’ worldview. Not man’s morality, but God’s glorification is at center. Although he conceives that both devotees of the Living God and those who pay homage to idols offer worship as a response to revelation, yet there are strict parameters as to what constitutes ‘true’, i.e. acceptable, worship.<sup>111</sup> Here McDermott is ambivalent. On the one hand, he reproduces Edwards’ qualifications for ‘true worship’—a new disposition and participation in the divine;<sup>112</sup> while, on the other hand, he nullifies their significance as qualifications – dispositions become universal and participation in the divine is only a matter of coming into contact with elements of primary special revelation apparently residually present in nearly every socio-religious community.

According to McDermott, Edwards’ ‘new approach to soteriology’ simply holds that an inner religious consciousness—a new disposition—is ‘the only prerequisite to salvation ...

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<sup>107</sup> ‘M’123, *Works*13, 287.

<sup>108</sup> ‘Sermon Twenty-One’, *Works*9, 400.

<sup>109</sup> McDermott, *Confronts the Gods*, 104-05.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>111</sup> ‘M’986 [TS Beinecke].

<sup>112</sup> *Confronts the Gods*, 89, 133-34.



faith is subsumed by the category of disposition.’<sup>113</sup> Repeating Morimoto, McDermott says that disposition functions as the ontological ground of forensic imputation. As he puts it:

Martin Luther’s salvation by faith *alone* becomes for Edwards salvation by faith *primarily*. While Luther emphasizes that in justification sinners are *counted* as righteous, Edwards insists that sinners are actually *made* holy in the act of regeneration.<sup>114</sup>

Under this account, Edwards’ emphasis on disposition as primary and faith as secondary undermines not only his Reformed but also the Reformation contention that salvation is the justification of the *ungodly*. Instead, salvation is the bare possession of a saving disposition, which, *de facto*, renders one holy. Justification is subsequently grounded in the holy disposition of the human person.<sup>115</sup>

Following this line of thought, McDermott suggests a new perspective on Edwards’ interest in the ‘heathen’ and history. He portrays an Edwards who, while in the process of not only attempting to circumvent the deists attack on orthodoxy’s epistemology, but also in his collative studies on non-Christian religions, observed in the ‘heathen’ the same exercises of disposition peculiar to Christian contexts and concluded that they, too, can obtain justification but through non-Christian means. All evidence begged this conclusion: Isaac Barrow, Samuel Clarke, Ralph Cudworth, Daniel DeFoe, and others, provided seemingly incontrovertible evidence that some ‘heathens’ worshipped, perhaps without knowing it, the true God.<sup>116</sup> There also was evidence of revealed religion in everything ranging from trinitarian elements in Dao-de-jing and messianic foreshadows in I-Ching to incarnational theology in Greco-Roman ‘pagan’ philosophers and propitiatory doctrines in Native American animism and, so, a seminal gospel nearly everywhere. Of course, the potential efficacy of Christ’s redemptive work could easily infuse a saving disposition in every person born into the world. Indeed, the dynamics of ‘heathen’ moral behavior and religious systems tended to confirm it. If all these things were the case, according to McDermott, then Edwards could not but draw the conclusion that the revelatory items, which were not entirely despoiled over the years and present in a variety of forms throughout the world, could induce a generic faith-act for justification. Thus, the history of God’s special revelation should not be interpreted in narrow, restrictivistic terms, but more broadly: God desires the conversion of the heathen for their

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 136, 138.

<sup>116</sup> JE collated materials about non-Christian religions and pagan philosophers from a variety of sources including dictionaries, encyclopedias, travelogues, monographs, newspaper articles and tangentially referential sources (such as sermons). Peter Thueson’s (Ed.) forthcoming *The ‘Catalogue’, Vol. 27, The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, and the individual ‘M’ entries in which various passages from the aforementioned sources were copied, cite both references and the sources JE desired to procure. See ‘Edwards’ Reading “Catalogue” at Yale Divinity School or, alternatively, McDermott’s citation of a select number of sources in *Confronts the Gods*, 92-94.



happiness, which, in turn, makes Him happy. Yet they are never ‘lost’ in an absolute sense – they have salvation in a disposition and, bear in mind, justification is only an encounter away.

According to McDermott, the scope of the historical redemption drama did not narrow prior to the millennial age. Rather, due to the ‘progressive nature of revelation’, it could only widen; for ‘In Edwards’s view a saving disposition was nearly always a disposition to receive Christ.’<sup>117</sup> Consequently, the progress of revelatory-redemption history neither served to render non-Christians all the more ‘inexcusable’ for their idolatry and religious ‘darkness’, nor did it hold a preparatory function (either to facilitate pedagogical intercourse with the Jews or prepare the Gentiles for a future encounter with the gospel), per traditional Calvinism. Instead, in keeping with McDermott’s reading of Edwards, advancing revelation effects a greater, even global, conversion-cum-justification of the masses. Christ would reign on earth, but not necessarily over Christians: the kingdom of God is more generous than that.

Aside from the misappropriation of Edwardsean dispositions, the difficulty with this reading lies in the fact that Edwards’ corpus does not accurately support it. To start with, instead of opposing Luther, Edwards can be seen joining the Wittenberg Reformer’s ‘Disputation Against Scholastic Theology’ through his conviction that that which preceded conversion was not a disposition, but an indisposition and active rebellious and unbridled selfishness.<sup>118</sup> As a result, Edwards sustained throughout his public preaching ministry a restrictivist soteriology that required regeneration and forensic imputation for ‘true religious worship’. For example, just as his Northampton congregation heard him preach in 1733, that ‘those that die heathen [God] will prey upon and Exert his Cruelty Upon forever’, so too, in 1751, his Housatonnuk and Mohawk auditors in Stockbridge heard (through an interpreter) that, all those who ‘don’t worship the true God that made the world and Jesus Christ his Son’ go to hell.<sup>119</sup> Scores of sermons could be cited that insist on the necessity of regeneration, that equate the ‘heathen’ with the ‘lost’, and that speak of the inevitability of judgment, eternal torments, and salvation through faith in Christ alone. Consider, however, a small sample of sermon ‘doctrines’ from 1746 through the end of his tenure at Stockbridge in January 1758:

Matt. 13:47-50 (1746): ‘Wicked men will hereafter be cast into a furnace of fire.’

Ex. 9:12-16 (1747): ‘They that will not yield to the power of God’s word shall be broken by the power of his hand.’

Prov. 5:11 (1752): ‘When wicked men come to hell they will believe what they heard in the preaching of the word.... They will see what fools they were.’<sup>120</sup>

Ezek. 22:14 (1741, 1755): ‘Since God has undertaken to deal with impenitent sinners, they shall neither shun the threatened misery, nor deliver themselves out of it, nor can they bear it.’<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> *Confronts the Gods*, 139, 140.

<sup>118</sup> *WA*, 1:225.

<sup>119</sup> Rev. 3:15 (c.1733); Matt. 7:13-14 (1751).

<sup>120</sup> Prov. 5:11 (3), ‘St[ockbridge] Ind[ians] & Moh[awks]’, Andover Collection (Trask Library).



Rev. 6:15-16 (1732, 1755): 'That wicked men will hereafter earnestly wish to be turned to nothing and forever cease to be that they may escape the wrath of God.'

1 John 3:10 (1756): 'All mankind through the whole world are one of these two sorts, either God's people or the devil's people' (p.1).

Rev. 6:16 (1746/7, 1757): 'The weight of rocks and mountains is light in comparison of that wrath of God that shall hereafter come on ungodly men' (p.1)

Mk 10:17-27 (1743, 1757): 'Obs[ervation]. 1. There are many persons that have a great desire to have eternal life and seek it with some earnestness, that yet never obtain it.'

From 1750 through to his departure for Princeton, Edwards frequently re-preached sermons from the 1730s and 40s, retaining in almost every case their doctrinal content that repeatedly articulated an unmistakable particularist theology requiring the new birth, God-given holiness and Christ's righteousness, and defensive treatments of hell.<sup>122</sup> Which is to say, Edwards was hardly dissatisfied, embarrassed, or 'scandalized' with his theological development in the 1730s. Indeed, it would be extremely difficult to show any deviation in his restrictivist soteriology from the mid-1730s through 1758, the year of his death.<sup>123</sup>

Likewise, his private/semi-private '*M*' notebooks reveal a particularist account of history and redemption and purport the same prerequisites for 'true worship'. Here we need only consider '*M*' 1357, one of Edwards' last, in which he records from John Brine (1703-65) the 'defects' of 'heathen morality' and 'pagan philosophers['] morality' for the express purpose of indicating their categorical lack of 'true virtue'.<sup>124</sup> Without 'true virtue' 'true worship' is 'blind' worship.<sup>125</sup> God does not receive it for the same reason that 'common morality' and 'inordinate self-love' are not truly virtuous – no dispositional union with the Mediator through the Spirit; that is, no holiness. As he previously said in '*M*' 1153: 'Other kinds of sincerity of desires and endeavours' are 'good for nothing in God's sight [and are] not accepted with him as of any weight or value to recommend, satisfy, excuse, or counter-balance'. He continues in the same entry to make his repudiation of the principal doctrine of Enlightenment religion complete:

Hence we learn that nothing appears in the reason and nature of things, for the consideration of any moral weight or validity of that former kind of sincerity that has been spoken of,<sup>126</sup> at all obligating us to believe or leading us to suppose, that God has made any positive promises of salvation or grace, or any saving assistance, or any spiritual benefit whatsoever to any endeavors, strivings, prayers, or obedience of those that hitherto have no true virtue or holiness in their hearts

<sup>121</sup> Published as 'Future Punishment of the Wicked Unavoidable and Intolerable', *Banner-Works*, 2:78f.

<sup>122</sup> Of the approximately 345 sermons preached between 1751-Jan.1758, more than half (54 percent or 183) were re-preached sermons with an original composition prior to 1750. Moreover, the majority of these re-preached sermons are from 1741 and earlier.

<sup>123</sup> See Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 105, 203, 208-09 and 238-39.

<sup>124</sup> Brine, 'Of the Defects which attended the Doctrine of Morality, as taught by Philosophers and Poets' in *A Treatise on Various Subjects* (London, 1750), c. 3. See also '*M*' 1162 [TS Beinecke].

<sup>125</sup> [TS Beinecke]. See also the except from '*M*' 1334 in *Banner-Works*, 2:492f.

<sup>126</sup> I.e. in Andover copy p. 455 of 'Miscellanies' notebook No. 6.



though we should suppose all the sincerity, and the utmost degree of endeavor which it is possible to be in a person without holiness.<sup>127</sup>

In a second corollary with the heading, 'SALVATION OF THE HEATHEN', he is more specific as he flatly rejects the possibility of non-Christocentric salvation in any form: 'Hence we learn that nothing appears in the reason and nature of things ... that God will reveal Christ, and give the necessary means of grace, or some way or other bestow true holiness and saving grace, and so eternal salvation to those heathen that are sincere'. The point is that they *neither have a gracious disposition nor any ability to exercise true virtue and, consequently, to offer true worship*.<sup>128</sup> Nor, in fact, do they have any recourse outside 'the necessary means of grace' – the gospel in Christ, which, in Edwards, is not simply a post-Advent phenomenon.

Thus it would be a mistake to say that the second treatise in *Two Dissertations*, i.e. *The Nature of True Virtue*, primarily aimed at Scottish moral sentimentalists; it had deists more immediately in sight. In Edwards' carefully calculated rejoinder, the treatise *End of Creation* lays the foundation of a theocentric worldview, while *True Virtue* tears up the moorings of the deistic worldview. There can be little doubt that their collective thesis would have been the centerpiece of his unfinished *magnum opus*.

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There is no indication in either Edwards' private or public records that he favored or was developing an unorthodox, non-particularistic salvation scheme. In fact, the evidence holds the opposite true. To be sure, he believed that pre-Israelite characters such as Melchizedek enjoyed salvation, as well as the 'Old Testament church' – God effectually working through the *Word*-based revelation first given to their antediluvian fathers and then to them.<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, the same could *not* be said about Greco-Roman thinkers, Chinese philosophers, or (prior to the New Testament dispensation) non-Jewish religions and (subsequent to the First Advent) non-Christian religions. Though Edwards held that the sages of Athens and Rome were 'eminent for many moral virtues' derived from ancient revelation, yet without 'true virtue' obtained from the God of the Jewish religion and the 'means' pertaining thereto, their morality was but *splendida peccata* ('splendid sins') and their theological insights 'almost divine truths'.<sup>130</sup> But nobody, according to Edwards, is *almost* saved; 'heathens' and 'infidels' who 'die in unbelief' and 'don't worship the true God ... and Jesus Christ his Son',

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<sup>127</sup> [TS Beinecke]. Compare JE's discussion in Pt. III 'Freedom and Responsibility' §5 'Sincerity, No Excuse': 'Hence it follows, there is nothing that appears in the reason and nature of things, which can justly lead us to determine, that God will certainly give the necessary means of salvation, or some way or other bestow true holiness and eternal life on those heathen, who are sincere ... in their endeavors to find out the will of the deity, and to please him, according to their light, that they may escape his future displeasure and wrath, and obtain happiness in their future state, through his favor' (*FW, Works*1, 319).

<sup>128</sup> See Fiering, *Moral Thought*, c.5: 'Hell and the Humanitarians'.

<sup>129</sup> 'Scripture' Nos. 138a, 232, 236, *Works*15; Is. 27:13 [1741].

<sup>130</sup> *Charity*, *Works*8, 310; 'M'965, 979 [TS Beinecke] cited in McDermott, *Confronts the Gods*, 186.



quite plainly, are ‘destroyed’.<sup>131</sup> Edwards’ dispositional soteriology, so far from offering (in the words of McDermott) ‘A Possibility of Reconciliation’ for the heathen, actually accentuates the particularistic dimensions of his philosophical-theology.

So while the Cambridge Platonists may have argued that the most important truths of Christianity had been propagated universally from the beginning, and that those truths chiefly pertained to worship and happiness, and so we may have Jonathan Edwards echoing John Smith, yet in Edwards *true* worship and happiness have their contexts *exclusively in light of God revealed as Savior*. McDermott makes the heart of this gospel message, perhaps inadvertently, peripheral for Edwards, which it certainly was not.

The manuscript evidence in Edwards’ corpus tells a different story to that of McDermott. The ‘Miscellanies’, sermons, and treatises, present a God who safeguards the aesthetic and moral quality of the worship He receives by:

1. Having it mediated through Jesus Christ;
2. *Emanating* it from Himself, receiving it to Himself (the indwelling Spirit), and *remanating* it back again and thereby replicating Himself, by Himself (the Son); and
3. Employing means—*very specific means*—so as to control and precisely determine every component of the closed, not open, process.

Consequently, the heathen are subject to what is called in Reformed theology, ‘Circumstantial Unbelief’ – an apology of theologians dating back to Augustine’s *On the City of God*, which taught that God exercises judgment on particular individuals or (especially) people groups and nations by sovereignly and justly withholding the means to the external call of salvation. Edwards owned this doctrine in its entirety. As a matter of fact, it is a regulative principle in his philosophy of history. His theocentric worldview holds that God unfolds a program of redemption for His *ad extra* glorification, but that that process is historical and, significantly, means centered and means identifiable.

### ***3. The Redemption Discourse, Phasing, and the Moorings of Preparationism***

Aside from the polemical appeal to history, Edwards also found the concept of chronological development constructive for systematics. This comes out in his 1739 thirty-sermon series, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, where he provides for himself an objective model and methodological foundation for his theological perspective, which he had been striving toward since his teenage conversion.<sup>132</sup> Ultimately, the strategy of the ‘Redemption Discourse’

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<sup>131</sup> Matt. 7:13-14 (1751). JE’s most sustained defense of hell was written in 1755 (‘M’ 1348/1356).

<sup>132</sup> The ministerial setting of the Redemption Discourse is presented by Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards*, c. 8; and Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor*. JE also refers to this work and the future project of its



discloses (in John F. Wilson's phraseology) the culmination of Edwards' 'technical soteriological achievement', the great effort toward 'a final synthesis' of his theological, exegetical, and philosophical thought in a persuasive 'historical or mythic narrative'.<sup>133</sup>

To avoid wrongly construing Edwards' purpose in *Work of Redemption*, it must be understood that it is not primarily a historical work, but rather a theological treatise within a historical framework.<sup>134</sup> Just as we saw in a previous section how the interrelationships within the Trinity function as the theological fulcrum for his systematic understanding of soteriology (and, indeed, of all theology), so it is within a historical framework that God's work of redemption is best made intelligible and communicable. For Edwards, the theoretical infrastructure and foundation of theology is a Trinity-effected redemption, which is best explained and understood within the biblically disclosed time-boundaries given to the subject.

By the 'Redemption Discourse', Edwards intends to (re)align what was initially his auditor's perspective and appraisal of time/history *and* space to an inherently valuable *biblical* account of spatiotemporality. Beyond his growing anxieties about deism and New England's incipient Arminianism, the impetus behind these intentions emerged from certain sociological developments that occurred in Northampton, which also provided occasion for the original publicizing of his historically integrated redemption-theology. Space does not permit a proper examination of these events, but suffice it to say that, with the anticlimactic denouement of the 1734/5 awakening, spiritual declension began to settle in amongst Edwards' parishioners. 'Backsliding' in all of its 'ugly' forms required addressing.<sup>135</sup> The mood Edwards perceived from his congregations communicated to him that not only was Christianity's role being marginalized in the spheres of business, politics and society, but his role too. Christianity's pervasiveness was, little by little, vanishing from all aspects of everyday life. He could not help but wonder if the evils of Arminian antinomianism or, worse, deistic secularism, were infiltrating his Puritan enclave.

Despite adjustments to his homiletical technique, Edwards' early attempts to stabilize and navigate his congregation through these 'low' points were only met with continued stolidity and regression. He therefore altered his rhetorical strategy further. Kinnach comments, that in the closing years of the 1730s, Edwards exhibits a distinct tendency to 'write more complex sermons and, finally, sermon series.'<sup>136</sup> By taking one doctrine or principle and attempting to exploit all its potential in an extended series, Edwards was able to string together several intimately and tangentially related theological, philosophical, biblical and ethical themes, issues, and concepts and present them with a sense of continuity and

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expansion into his *magnum opus* as the 'Redemption Discourse' and the 'Work of Redemption.' In the following discussion I shall do likewise.

<sup>133</sup> See Wilson, 'EI', *Works*9, 1ff.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> See *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor*, 125-30.

<sup>136</sup> 'General Introduction', *Works*10, 103.



pervasive relevance. In other words, the sermon series became the most efficient way, short of a treatise, to communicate the depth and scope of the Christian worldview.

The ‘Redemption Discourse’ was his most ambitious ‘worldview’ series. As a theological work, it systematically expanded the ultimate unity of the spiritual and material, the local and global, the divine and the human spheres: the God of Northampton was no deistic conception. By casting the project in an elementary historical framework, Edwards places the urgent and the mundane affairs of mankind in the context of eternity and, in so doing, critically evaluates the projects and dealings of his colonial auditors and even ‘Old Light’ antagonists and Enlightenment opponents within the eternal plan of the Trinity.

Thus Edwards strategically used the ‘Redemption Discourse’ as a pastoral tool to adjust community and personal perspectives by instilling sacredness to all time and space. ‘The work of God’, he taught, ‘is but one. ’Tis ... but ... one scheme, one contrivance.’<sup>137</sup> We have already noted the one goal by which the scheme becomes one, viz. ‘God created the world to provide a spouse and kingdom for his Son’; now Edwards builds on this premise to emphasizes God’s and therefore true religion’s continued importance by connecting all time, all nations, and all personal history and futures, with redemption history.

### **3.a. *Three Major Divisions***

There are three sources which Edwards consults for a holistic view of redemption history: Scripture history; biblical prophetic history; and the secular history of philosophers, historians, and rhetoricians. From these literary sources, he discerns three major divisions in God’s work of redemption. These are distinct segments or periods that mark out different stages in its constitutive ‘history’.

1. *Preparation*—‘The first reaching from the fall of man to Christ’s incarnation’
2. *Accomplishment/Achievement*— ‘The second from Christ’s incarnation till his resurrection, or the whole time of his humiliation’
3. *Application/Realization*— ‘The third from thence to the end of the world.’<sup>138</sup>

The inference is that preparation leads to salvation ‘purchased’ by the life and death of Jesus Christ, which is then applied to the church, until the consummation of the age: ‘So that the whole dispensation as it includes the preparation and the imputation and application and success of Christ’s redemption is here called the Work of Redemption.’<sup>139</sup> The three periods are subdivisions, therefore, of one organic process, ‘the Work of Redemption.’ Nevertheless, each period does have distinctive characteristics.

The first of the three is discussed in sermons ‘Two’ through ‘Twelve’. It is defined by his conventional Christian interpretation of the Old Testament. The Jewish Scriptures not only

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<sup>137</sup> ‘M’702, *Works*18.

<sup>138</sup> ‘Sermon Two’, *Works*9, 127.

<sup>139</sup> ‘Sermon One’, *Works*9, 117.



point to the coming of Messiah, but also define him and explain his anticipated work, albeit in figural and typological schemes.

The second 'great period' is the center of history, 'the fullness of time' when the Son of God was incarnate. Referring back to the first period from christological 'Sermon Eighteen', Edwards teaches that 'all that success of Christ's redemption that was before [the incarnation] was only preparatory and was by way of anticipation, as some few fruits are gathered before the harvest. There was no more success before Christ came than God saw needful to prepare the way for his coming.'<sup>140</sup> Which is to say, the few who were redeemed in the world prior to the First Advent were necessarily associated with the preparatory means, i.e. the Hebrew nation with the Hebrew Scriptures. As we shall see, for Edwards, *means availability* is what determines the salvific status of the nations (v.i. §4).

We now focus, however, on the 'preparation' period, the first great periodization of the 'Work of Redemption', because it is here in which Edwards gives so much attention to the positive aspects of pagan thinkers and 'heathen' religions. In the 'Redemption Discourse', preparatory periods and activities contextualize their proximity to and agency within the divine work, but only in accordance with the two technical uses Edwards reserves for the term 'preparation'.

First, he means it temporally. By the linear unfolding of the work of redemption where one event leads into or precedes another, God, as it were, sets the stage or *prepares* for the next episode or period, building to the great christic event.<sup>141</sup> In this way, Edwards establishes a connection between two events and/or persons in such a way that the preceding event (the preparation) is not only reflected in the next event but the next event involves and develops its *prooemium*. However, Edwards insists that the *essential* linkage between them has nothing to do with temporal or causal considerations. Rather, both events are constitutively linked to divine providence. God decrees one thing to the next in the *historia salutis* according to 'his good pleasure', agreeable to the *pactum salutis*.

Looking back then, one of the first great movements of progression in the work of redemption was the separating and preparing of a people and nation from which the Messiah would come.<sup>142</sup> Another example was the 'final dispensation', from the Diaspora to the first Advent, which marked the preparation of the Gentile world through the Jewish religion and messianic expectation. In pagan world events, Cyrus prepared the way for the Jews to return to Canaan; the destruction of the Persian Empire, which preceded the emergence of the Greek, led to a universal language by means of which the Hebrew Scriptures could be disseminated in script and discussion. Consequently, the proliferation of learning and philosophy, Semitic and Hellenistic, paved the way for the future propagation of the gospel message. And lastly,

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<sup>140</sup> 'Sermon Eighteen', *Works*9, 344.

<sup>141</sup> 'Sermon Five', *Works*9, 177.

<sup>142</sup> 'Sermon Five', *Works*9, 177-80.



the *pax Romana* settled world events but also emphasized the bondage nature of the world, both of which were important for the stage in which the Messiah would enter: 'The great works of God in the world during this whole space of time were all preparatories to this.'<sup>143</sup> Thus, the heathens had their positive roles in the temporal preparation for Christ.

The second technical usage of 'preparation' relates to the inner-structure of redemption theology itself. Again, not by any inherent causal connection, but according to the 'fitness' of the divine will, there is present in the work of redemption a pattern by way of ordering and identifying the process. Whether at the cosmic, logical, temporal, or personal level, the process is 'ordinarily' distinguishable through its triadic pattern: preparation, achievement, realization.<sup>144</sup> And although this pattern resembles the programmatic series of the old Puritan preparationist model of contiguity, where each standardized step is predictably followed by another, yet it possesses a depth dimension beyond the personal level, rendering it paradigmatic by virtue of the *universal elements* within and interrelatedness of all redemptive activity, whether in time or humanity, heaven or earth.

The common elements of the work of redemption (preparation, achievement, realization) obtain 'objective' status as properties of the *historia salutis* and by necessary antecedent relation, the *pactum salutis*. Consequently, while the 'Redemption Discourse' makes use of a branching structure, or the pattern of subordination of parts within the logical framework, it is, nevertheless, theologically governed by the threefold division of preparation/achievement/realization. Equally important for Edwards is their relatedness to Scripture. Since the work of redemption is itself a matter of divine revelation, the theoretical objectivity of the common elements can only be authenticated if they are inherently biblical. This, however, is not a problem. For Edwards, not only are the patterns and concepts implicitly and explicitly present in the Bible, but also the terminology. Hence, the employment of the biblical language of 'promise', 'performance', and 'preservation' as interchangeable terminology for his triadic pattern of 'preparation', 'achievement', and 'realization'.<sup>145</sup>

At the level or perspective of the divine, preparation corresponds with the Triune 'confederation' decreeing the work of redemption, providence and creation. Achievement means the incarnation, while realization happens through the salvific work of Christ in His sin bearing, crucifixion, resurrection. The final judgment and Christ's surrendering all things to the Father is the consummation. At the historical level, where Edwards divides 'this whole space of time into three periods', preparation compares with the fall of man to the incarnation; achievement to 'Christ's incarnation till his resurrection, or the whole time of his humiliation'; and realization concurs 'from thence to the end of the world.'<sup>146</sup> Finally, at the

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<sup>143</sup> 'Sermon Two', *Works9*, 128.

<sup>144</sup> JE's analytic reasoning bears little resemblance to the triadic movement of Hegel's dialectic process.

<sup>145</sup> *Works9*, 160-65, 169, 215, 525.

<sup>146</sup> 'Sermon Two', *Works9*, 127.



personal, corporate or national level, preparation relates to *the providences and means of grace associated to the 'external calling' of the gospel*, which effectually culminate in salvation, the achievement. Realization is identified with divine preservation through to heavenly glorification. Thus, the personal, subjective or interior level, which may be spoken of in terms of a larger scale—a religion, a nation, is isomorphic of the historical. The historical, in turn, mirrors the divine. It is noteworthy that, at the personal, corporate, or national level, preparation may take one of two courses: either preparation for salvation or preparation for damnation.

Contrary to the inclusivistic redemptive agendas of Morimoto and McDermott, Edwards pursues an interpretation of redemption history with two distinct paths for two distinct categories of people. *Both paths, however, are determined by their moment-to-moment access to the progressive revelatory means of salvation.*<sup>147</sup>

#### 4. *The Mediator of Means*

In *Work of Redemption*, Edwards sets forth the one axiomatic requirement for reconciliatory possibilities between God and man—a mediator. When man sinned, ‘God the Father would have no more to do with man immediately ... He would henceforth have no concern with man but only through a mediator [i.e. Christ], either in teaching men or in governing or bestowing any benefits on them.’<sup>148</sup> The Mediator Himself would be the means of instruction, the substance of the communication, and salvation itself. All divine revelation to the world, then, is to be understood in terms of the *Word of God* as the word of God, the special revelation of God, originally conveyed through oral tradition, enduringly by Scripture, ultimately in Jesus of Nazareth, and always through history and natural types.

The Mediator is, therefore, the means, such as have been necessary for salvation since the tragedy in Eden. Thus, according to Edwards, ‘The Word of God’ as mediatorial revelation ‘was not given for any particular age, but for all ages.’<sup>149</sup>

Edwards delineates several reasons why God uses logocentric, word-invested means, all which revolve around the idea that, ‘’Tis suitable and becoming’ since Christ is the divine Word. Which is to say, their *raison d’être* is both aesthetic and didactic. Since ‘means’ are associated with Christ in terms of His nature, that is, in terms of specially revealing God, Edwards believes that, ‘We can’t find them out by the light of nature, for they are such as

<sup>147</sup> ‘M’1162 and 1357 [TS Beinecke]. Cf. Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 108.

<sup>148</sup> *Works*9, 131. The late 1730s saw a flurry of ‘M’ entries on ‘MEDIATION OF CHRIST’ and ‘MEDIATOR, why the second person of the Trinity’ (‘Table to the “Miscellanies”’, *Works*13, 140). See for example, ‘M’539, 594, 622, 733, 737, 764a, 772, 773, and 781 in *Works*18.

<sup>149</sup> ‘M’583, *Works*18, 119.



depend on God's arbitrary constitution'.<sup>150</sup> '[M]eans which God designs' are, then, an 'immensely more excellent and glorious way [of religion] than by the light of nature' because they too reflect the mental/relational excellence inherent to God's arbitrariness.<sup>151</sup> Therefore, 'Tis only because 'tis God's pleasure to annex his blessing to the means of his own appointing ... for seeing God is the sovereign bestower of salvation he will bestow it in his own way.'<sup>152</sup> The particular way God has chosen to 'annex his blessing' to means involves the Holy Spirit, who illuminates and impassions recipients of God's logocentric revelatory means. Moreover, since 'the sum' of what Christ 'purchased' for the elect is the Holy Spirit, 'means and ordinances' themselves may be seen as 'conveyancers of the Spirit'.<sup>153</sup>

Edwards cautions, however, that though 'we know that God's manner is to bestow his grace on men by outward means ... And, therefore, if persons are out of the way of those means, there is no likelihood of their receiving grace,' yet, in and of themselves, 'they have no influence to produce grace, either as causes or instruments, or any other way,' though they are 'necessary in order to it.' Divine means, therefore, are necessary but not sufficient for grace, for in order to their effectiveness each Person of the Trinity must be involved, but 'we know not when the Spirit's time is.'<sup>154</sup>

In lieu of the centrality of special revelation in God's self-glorifying scheme, Edwards' history of the salvific status and function of the nations can be determined by the special revelation made available to them. The history of redemption unfolds a narrative with juxtaposing storylines, just like the two sides of predestination or the bilateral effects of the gospel: the one of promise, blessing and salvation, the other of forswearing, cursing and damnation. Both storylines, however, are developed by the theme of *means availability* – a sort of hermeneutic for reading history. God gives and advances special revelation in one nation to their potential benefit, while He denies or withholds further revelation from another. The key is: when the substance of a nation's revelatory content fails to keep pace with the historical progress of redemption, the 'old' revelation, for all intents and purposes, becomes redundant in terms of salvific potential and (as we shall see in the following subsection) only serves to condemn. Conversely, reception of fresh revelation elevates one's status in the preparatory state, to the threshold of achievement – salvation itself.

#### 4.a. *Spiritual Judgments*

Preaching on the text of Amos 8:11, Edwards assert the doctrine: 'Spiritual judgments are the most terrible that can befall a people.'<sup>155</sup> Special revelation is the topic at hand. According to

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<sup>150</sup> Ezek. 33:4-5 (1735/6).

<sup>151</sup> Is. 5:4 (1734, 1757).

<sup>152</sup> Ezek. 33:4-5 (1735/6). Italics added.

<sup>153</sup> 'M'689, *Works*18, 253.

<sup>154</sup> 'M'538, 539, *Works*18, 83-84, 84, 86-87.

<sup>155</sup> (1729). The MS possesses a symbol which, according to Kimnach, indicates that it was re-preached.



Edwards all temporal spiritual judgments may be reduced to these two heads: '1. A being deprived of the outward hearing of God's word; 2. a being deprived of the inward hearing of it.' In this context 'Spiritual judgment' number '1' is synonymous with the more sanitized 'Circumstantial Unbelief.' Destitute of the means to the external call, the prospect of an effectual internal call is, according to Edwards, 'doubtful ... very improbable'.<sup>156</sup>

When he applies the doctrine of spiritual judgments in his work on the history of redemption, number '1' is prominent in the discussion on pre-Christian, non-Jewish nations.

The first apostasy from the revelation given to Adam and proliferated through his posterity to the 'fathers of the nations' resulted in man's near complete annihilation. Noah, however, preserved the former and also furthered the special revelatory knowledge of God in the next age. But again declension followed. So while all heathen nations came originally from those that were acquainted with the 'true God and the true religion', yet 'they all by little and little degenerated into gross idolatry and ignorance of the true and became wholly destitute of the word of God *excepting* [sic] *only the posterity of Abraham*.'<sup>157</sup>

Overlooked by McDermott, this last clause is pivotal to understanding Edwards' pre-Advent, 'preparatory period' approach to the heathen nations. At the time of the call to Abram, 'true religion' was, for all intents and purposes, extinct on the earth – there was not so much as a Noah figure left once Terah died.<sup>158</sup> But instead of judging the earth, God reveals His redemptive plan to Abram. The terms had simply changed: the oral tradition had become a covenant tradition; special covenant revelation displaced so-called 'natural' religion.<sup>159</sup>

Thus, the history of redemption narrows dramatically at Abram: positively, a covenant of grace is announced; negatively, head '1' stipulates that only one particular nation will possess the means by which God would administer redeeming grace. Revelation progressed and the history of redemption leapt forward. God had trumped His own oral tradition of the 'proto-evangelium' and now Abraham/Israel had become a type of ark until the time of Christ – the climatic antitype.<sup>160</sup> *The nations of the world were being judged*. But instead of drowning them, God excludes them from the 'ark' of the Abrahamic covenant in the same way He 'shut the door of mercy' to Noah's ark on the world's inhabitants.<sup>161</sup>

The cultic system in the Hebrew nation trained them to look to God to provide a sacrifice, that is, to look to God as a merciful Savior and redeemer, to acknowledge His holiness, majesty, and jealousy, 'which', Edwards thought, 'is the exercise of the same disposition of mind as is

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<sup>156</sup> 'M'1299 [TS Beinecke].

<sup>157</sup> Amos 8:11. Emphasis mine.

<sup>158</sup> 'Sermon Four', *Works*9, 158-59, 165-66.

<sup>159</sup> 'M'598, *Works*18, 140.

<sup>160</sup> 'Sermon Three', *Works*8, 152.

<sup>161</sup> Matt. 25:10 (1742, 1756): 'doctrine': 'The shutting of the door of mercy', 1.



exercised in actually believing on Christ crucified, and is the same sort of act.’<sup>162</sup> The Jews therefore could have a gracious disposition infused within them because they were the possessors of the means by which God covenanted to bring salvation, first to them and then to the wider world. Which is to say, Israelites could be justified in the same way as the future Christian church, viz. not by obedience, but in trusting God to provide and accept a sacrifice for sin and having faith that He would be a Savior to humanity and grant righteousness. Thus, Edwards reasoned, the two covenants were really different versions of the same covenant of grace initiated with Abraham.<sup>163</sup> (All but standard fare for Covenant theology.)

The Mosaic covenant provided a ‘trial’ not only for the Jews but the whole world as to whether they could be obedient to the revelation thus far. It too was preparatory, yet with a revelation so much more refined and lucid than the ambiguous ‘protoevangelium’ that was surpassed by the Abrahamic covenant.

In the covenant of grace, however, God reserves the prerogative to implement the second head of spiritual judgments:

The second sort of spiritual judgment upon a people is with respect to the inward hearing of the word of God, when there is a famine or scarcity of the good influence of the word of God upon men’s minds it is a withholding of the Spirit of God.<sup>164</sup>

With greater privileges and clarity come greater responsibilities and expectations. Neglect God’s means at either individual or corporate levels and spiritual judgments follow, bringing in their wake a host of tribulations. So reads Edwards’ history of national Israel. Saul slights covenant privileges and the word falls on stony ground; likewise, with Israel. As a nation it was the bearer of God’s word, but though that ‘word be quick and powerful, yet it is nothing; it is a dead letter without the application of the Holy Spirit.’<sup>165</sup> Consequently, when the next advancement in redemption history came at hand, God rendered a judgment on the Jews: their revelation became law to condemn them, and the Spirit was given to illumine the Gentiles.

The residual revelation preserved amongst infidel nations rendered them ‘inexcusable’ for neglecting original revelation and what they currently possessed.<sup>166</sup> Yet, it could still serve in a preparatory sense to lead them to the Jews’ religion and the future hope for a Messiah.<sup>167</sup>

The pattern continues into the First Advent and Christian period; this time, however, the second spiritual judgment receives equal emphasis with the first.

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<sup>162</sup> ‘M’326, *Works*13, 406.

<sup>163</sup> ‘M’1354 [TS Beinecke]; ‘Sermon Twenty-Five’, *Works*9, 449-50, 525.

<sup>164</sup> Amos 8:11 (1729, n.d.).

<sup>165</sup> *Works*10, 543.

<sup>166</sup> Although Puritans such as Richard Baxter, Philip Doddridge, Cotton Mather, and Isaac Watts (all of whom McDermott cites) acknowledged that a scant few among the ‘heathen’ were saved, JE never explicitly or implicitly agrees. Rather, even in his most sanguine moments, he refuses to offer more hope for them than, ‘there is no likelihood in their receiving grace’ (‘M’538, *Works*18, 84).

<sup>167</sup> ‘Sermon Two’, *Works*9, 137.



The deists inveighed against the Calvinists because only one-sixth of the world had means to the gospel, which meant that their theology left hell brimming with souls. They simply failed to appreciate that spiritual judgment number ‘1’ remained in full effect. Unlike his deistic contemporaries, Edwards saw the Christian era of circumstantial unbelief both positively and negatively. Positively, their circumstantial unbelief was part and parcel of the preparatory movement of the divine drama: knowledge of new lands and peoples, though devoid of salvific means and therefore damned, only heightened millennial expectations; for Western knowledge of them soon meant their knowledge of the West’s religion, Christianity. God, in the meantime, providentially preserves and cultivates ancient residual revelation in preparation for ‘their more readily receiving the great doctrine of the gospel of Christ’.<sup>168</sup>

Hence Edwards’ optimism about the Native Americans stemmed not from their supposed possession of ‘saving disposition’,<sup>169</sup> but because the gospel was being brought to them. It was all very eschatological: they were emerging out of circumstantial unbelief, the day of grace was at hand for the barbarians, Christ’s millennial reign was dawning – at least from the perspective of the Housatonic River.<sup>170</sup>

Negatively, circumstantial unbelief could also be preparation of a more ominous sort. For example, in a MS sermon on Rev. 14:15 (c.1743) Edwards writes,

Let what has been said on this subject lead sinners to consider what *they* are ripening for. There are two kinds of persons that are here in this world in a preparatory state, elect and reprobates. Both are continued here in a state of preparation for an eternal state. Elect are here to be prepared [for heaven]. Reprobates are preparing [for hell]. They are ripening. And there are none [who] stand still, neither saints nor sinners.

Thus, the progress of redemption (and damnation) moves on, not only at the individual level, but also with collective people groups and nations.<sup>171</sup>

Just as with Israel in the Old Testament dispensation, so, too, the second spiritual judgment takes place amongst those with immediate access to the gospel.

The word of God let it be enjoyed in never so great plenty with never so great purity and dispensed with never so much faithfulness signifies nothing as to the designed effect and benefit of it without the Spirit of God. It is no purpose that the word is heard outwardly unless it be heard inwardly.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> McDermott, in his chapter ‘American Indians’ (11), repeatedly emphasizes JE’s rather innocuous use of ‘inclination’ and ‘disposition’ in connection with Native Americans to suggest something ontological, and therefore makes a rather artificial connection with the soteriology articulated in *RA*. He ignores the fact that, on some occasions (such as with Indian interests ‘to be instructed in the Christian religion’ (*Works*9, 434)), these words may not have any dispositional soteriological connection. See *Confronts the Gods*, 198-99.

<sup>170</sup> JE believed that at least two thousand years would elapse before the parousia (*M* 1198, 1199 [TS Beinecke]). His enthusiasm about the Indians relates to a sense of confirmation: he understood the ingathering of barbarous nations a precursor to Christ’s return.

<sup>171</sup> Matt. 7:13-14 (1750/1): ‘doctrine’: ‘All mankind of all nations ... are going in one or the other of these paths, either in the way that leads to life or the way that leads to destruction’ (1).

<sup>172</sup> Amos 8:11 (1729, n.d.).



To Edwards, it is a judgment proportionate to the excellency and availability of the light, therefore, it is the more severe: ‘the wrath of God is especially increased against unbelievers by that sin of unbelief. Because ... they do in effect give God the lie.’<sup>173</sup> For this reason, God continues to exercise this judgment upon Islam, which, according to Edwards, with accurate knowledge of the Christian message, rejects it and ‘perverts’ it into the religion of Satan.<sup>174</sup> Likewise, Roman Catholicism’s day of grace has come and gone. In Edwards’ history, Rome sold her ‘birthright’ during the Reformation and fused the ‘Apostles’ gospel’ with ‘superstition’. Consequently, God has withheld inward illumination from the minions of ‘popery’, to the end that it has become ‘Antichristian Rome ... spiritual Babylon.’<sup>175</sup> And Judaism, for failing to amalgamate with its Christian successor, also has been ‘given over to blindness of mind and hardness of heart’.<sup>176</sup>

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So while McDermott is correct to bring attention to the eschatological dimension of Edwards’ thought concerning ‘other’ religions and nations, yet he departs from the substance of his sources and the spirit of Edwards’ theology by diminishing the role of ‘gospel’ means and the punitive elements allied with them, in order to play up an implausible inclusivist-soteriology. Contrary to McDermott and Morimoto, Edwards, in his evangelistic outreach to the unconverted, does not appeal to ‘*gracious* dispositions’ for an exercise of faith, but rather he appeals to their *self-loving* disposition. His motivation for doing so lies in the second head of spiritual judgments; his optimism lies in their abiding within the compass of gospel means.

### ***5. The Usefulness of Self-love***

Edwards, of course, was not only a philosopher-theologian, but also a Puritan minister. His whole professional career, save for two short months as the president of the College of New Jersey, was spent as a pastor or gospel missionary. In that capacity he saw the dissemination of the gospel as the necessary and indispensable means of supernatural redeeming grace: ‘We have [no] notice given us of any restoration, any other way than by the gospel.’<sup>177</sup> Consequently, he held that inclusivistic and pluralistic theories were apostate theologies: ‘if unbelievers have anything forgiven them, then there is forgiveness out of Christ, and contrary to God’s everlasting and unalterable constitution of grace.’<sup>178</sup> The Mediator and His means are absolutely necessary, for all other systems of salvific hope, particularly the sentimental deistic theories, are ultimately built upon semi-Pelagian or Pelagian foundations:

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<sup>173</sup> John 3:36(b) (1734, 1755). Cf. *Works*9, 489-90.

<sup>174</sup> ‘M’613, *Works* 18, 145-46; *Banner-Works*, 2:488.

<sup>175</sup> ‘Sermon Twenty’, *Works*9, 374.

<sup>176</sup> *TM*, *Works*11, 322 n. 5.

<sup>177</sup> ‘M’596, *Works*18, 130.

<sup>178</sup> ‘M’648, *Works*18, 186.



What some call trusting in the ABSOLUTE MERCY OF GOD, i.e. trusting in his merciful nature without any consideration of a mediator to make way for and obtain the exercises of that mercy, is not much different from trusting in our own righteousness.<sup>179</sup>

Therefore, Edwards declares in the strongest particularist language:

None but those that do live under the calls of the Gospel shall be saved ... So there are none saved but only those that hear the calls of the Gospel. That is God's way and his only way of bringing men to salvation, viz. by the Gospel ... So that all those that never have heard the joyful sound of the Gospel are excluded, as they are not chosen.<sup>180</sup>

But in light of the second spiritual judgment, Edwards couples this doctrine with an additional proposition: 'Even of them that are called by the external call of the Gospel but few are saved.'<sup>181</sup> Hence Edwards found it his duty to admonish the unregenerate to 'seek' and 'strive', that is, to 'prepare' for salvation in the hope that they might become non-meritorious recipients of mercy. Their only hope lies in 'living under the calls of the Gospel', that is, exposure to the gospel community and, more immediately, faithful and true preaching (*theatrum salutis*). This had been the primary gospel strategy of the Reformation, which in Edwards' Puritan tradition became codified through the works of William Perkins.<sup>182</sup>

Contrary to Perry Miller's proposal, the *theatrum salutis* is not an external environment where beliefs are formed on the basis of 'sense perception' or 'rhetoric of sensation'.<sup>183</sup> Rather, it is the means-laden 'forum' in which God sovereignly dispenses saving grace. The minister's objective was to lead sinners to the place where God gathers and waters His flock.

Consequently, and in spite of his doctrine of double particular election, Edwards refines a strategy of sermon rhetoric for the 'Application' portion of his sermons,<sup>184</sup> which presses the unregenerate to autonomously 'prepare' for salvation, not by advancing from one 'step' to another, but through exposure to God's forum of grace. Such thinking underscores an important distinction between Edwards' *dispositional theory of autonomous preparation* and other forms of 'preparation for salvation' consisting of either (i) the ability of the sinner to independently prepare him/herself by gradual and definite advancements toward the threshold of conversion,<sup>185</sup> or (ii) the Roman Catholic expressions of cooperative preparation for

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>180</sup> Matt. 22:14 (1732).

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> See Bombaro, 'William Perkins: *Theatrum Salutis* and Preparationism'.

<sup>183</sup> See Miller, 'Sense of the Heart', 127-28.

<sup>184</sup> Here the influence of Timothy Edwards and Solomon Stoddard is noteworthy. Both provided homiletical models for JE to follow, and in that respect he offers nothing new, though his compositional artistry was of a superior nature. 'In effect, then, the Application is a period of experience for Edwards' auditory, a time of living imaginatively, through a "willing suspension of disbelief," a series of fictive experiences created and controlled by the artist-preacher' (Kimnach, 'The Literary Techniques of Jonathan Edwards', 50). 'Application' is synonymous with 'Exhortation' or 'Use of Instr[uction]'. In the midst of and subsequent to the periods of revival in 1734/5 and 1740-42, it was not uncommon for 'Applications' to find their way into the 'Doctrine' segment. 'Doctrine' and 'Improvement' became mixed modes when 'seeking' and 'trusting God' were explicated.

<sup>185</sup> One might term this 'Arminian' preparationism (see Pettit, *The Heart Prepared*, 125-29).



grace,<sup>186</sup> or, especially, (iii) the sinner being ‘prepared’ from first to last by God – a heteronomous preparation – which itself is an ‘if/then’ scenario: *if* God prepares, *then* it proves effectual.<sup>187</sup> In contrast to this latter scenario, Edwards’ autonomous preparation by the sinner should not be considered divine preparation at all. In Edwards’ scheme, the sinner merely ‘seeks’ divine help – and sinfully at that. Hence it would be better to call Edwards’ scheme a doctrine of ‘seeking’ rather than ‘preparing for salvation’: ‘seeking’ is done by the sinner, whom one presupposes ‘seeks’ and ‘strives’ without the soul-transforming assistance of the Spirit. Though, to be sure, the Spirit may ‘in an extraordinary manner’ heighten the *natural* sensibilities of the unregenerate to previously unattained levels.<sup>188</sup> *Divine* (or heteronomous or compositional) preparation, however, is only truly verified in retrospect, i.e. after the sinner experiences salvation – when the seeking or striving activities may then be credited to the monergistic work of the Spirit. This Edwards analyzes into minutiae, tracing the ‘distinguishing marks’ of those under divine convictions, humiliation, etc., in *Religious Affections* and *Distinguishing Marks*.<sup>189</sup> Of this doctrine of heteronomous preparation, Edwards finds objectivity or verification for articulating this idea *as* a biblical doctrine in his philosophy of history (v.i. §6.a). Only God’s preparing could result in salvation: sinful seeking is in no way a personal turning to God. To espouse anything other only blurs the line between a synergistic salvation model and a monergistic model, between Arminian evangelism and Calvinistic effectual calling.

The call for the unregenerate to ‘seek salvation’ in their own strength and out of selfish motives could be found not only in Stoddard’s *Treatise Concerning Conversion* and *The Efficacy of the Fear of Hell* (Boston, 1713), but also Thomas Shepard’s famous *Parable of the Ten Virgins*, and Thomas Hooker’s disputed *The Souls Preparation for Christ*, to name but few.<sup>190</sup> In this respect Edwards may be seen to simply follow in the steps of Perkins-Sibbes-Shepard-Stoddard. Yet Edwards did have something innovative to offer when he ensured the method by founding it, in large part, upon principles stemming from his dispositional ontology. And this is where Morimoto and McDermott entirely misunderstand Edwards. Edwards did not optimistically exhort the unconverted to engage means because their disposition *would* issue in a faith-act. Instead, true to his philosophical-anthropology, he

<sup>186</sup> Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, ‘The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent’, 2:92-94.

<sup>187</sup> William Perkins, for example, underscores the difference between what I am calling ‘autonomous’ preparation and ‘heteronomous’ preparation when he distinguished the beginnings of preparation and the beginnings of composition: ‘Beginnings of preparation arise from the work of the Law and are not necessarily works of God’s Spirit’ which are ‘the effect of regeneration begun’ (*Workes Perkins*, 1:638-41; 2:13). Heteronomous preparation is equivalent to irresistible grace and, therefore, rejected by Arminian theology, which asserted individual ‘free assent’.

<sup>188</sup> See *RA*, Part II.

<sup>189</sup> See Valeri’s analysis: ‘Evangelical Humiliation as Preparation for Conversion’ in ‘EI’. *Works*17, 36-40; and Smith, ‘EI’, *Works*2, 8-43.

<sup>190</sup> Their collective position, which made provision for natural-man’s affective nature, stands opposite to John Cotton’s extreme negation of such a notion (see Pettit, *The Heart Prepared*, 129-57).



appeals to their inordinate self-love precisely because it *would not* issue in a faith-act, but it might move them out of fear and self-loving self-preservation to ‘live under the calls of the Gospel’, where haply regenerating grace could supernaturally work a saving faith-act.<sup>191</sup>

Edwards proposes in *Religious Affections* that, in addition to reasonably engaging the rational mind through the word of God, the Christian minister must also appeal to natural-man’s innate operating principles, to the very structure of his being, that is, to man’s ‘inordinate’ self-love and its ‘less noble’ principles of fear, self-preservation, and self-interest. For, according to Edwards, only two things will move the whole will (rational will and appetites) of man, namely, fear and love.

There are no other principles, which human nature is under the influence of, that will ever make men conscientious, but one of these two, fear and love....<sup>192</sup>

His answer to the problem of exposing unregenerates to God’s forum of salvation is to appeal to natural-man’s love for himself, to his dispositional nature. What will move the *will* of the unregenerate man is his inordinate, sinfully selfish concern for himself. Fear of pain, punishment and the plague of guilt and death, will move a man. Natural-man’s interest in preserving his own life will motivate him to hear the gospel, not because he loves either it or its Author, but because he loves himself above all things, and needs it to preserve himself. This shallow self-loving concern to preserve oneself and serve one’s interest, Edwards explains, is enough to at least move the sinner into the forum of salvation in which hope and, ideally, salvation may be found.<sup>193</sup> The logic of disposition was applicable to evangelism too.

This type of ‘seeking’ of itself never issues in salvation; neither is it traceable nor meritorious. In this sense, preparation should not be thought of in terms of moving from one *step* or *stage* to another, but rather as a *status*. If one mentally engages the logocentric means (which, almost certainly effect some sort of non-meritorious moral reformation, while eliciting natural ‘affections’), then one is in a state of preparedness. Again, there is no gradual movement toward conversion, there is only the possibility of being converted by the Spirit if one retains ‘the seed of the word’—the Christ-‘material’ used by the Spirit to effect conversion. The matter finds rhetorical expression in terms of probability quotients: the more ‘material’ one imbibes and the more consistent the engagement within the *theatrum salutis*, the greater the ‘possibility’ of conversion:

The oftener these notions or ideas [of God’s grace in the gospel] are revived, and the more they are upheld in the soul, the greater the opportunity for the Spirit of God to infuse grace, because he hath more opportunity, hath opportunity more constantly. The more constantly the matter for

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<sup>191</sup> *Works*2, 108. Cf. Fiering, *Moral Thought*, 171. Hence the basic argument of *FW*: the ‘will’ does not constitute a real entity but is an expression of the strongest motive in a person’s character.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>193</sup> Prov. 9:12 (1738, 1751); 1Pet. 1:13 (1732).



grace to work upon is upheld, the more likely are persons to receive grace of the Spirit. 'Tis the wisest way to maintain the opportunity, for we know not when the Spirit's time is.<sup>194</sup>

Content and consistency are, therefore, the key to preparatory seeking, not stages. Even then all that Edwards can offer is the 'possibility' of salvation: preparatory seeking comes with no promises. Consequently, in his promotion of the 'possibility' of gospel benefits to selfish natural-man, Edwards sometimes fashions his 'Exhortations' similar to Pascal's Wager.<sup>195</sup>

Spiritual judgment number '2' was, for Edwards, commonplace in revival scoring, religiously declining England and, to an increasing degree, in New England. So he would preach, 'Some men, whatsoever means and advantages they have, and how much soever the work of conversion is carried on, will never be converted.'<sup>196</sup> The reasons for this are not just theological but dispositional:

1. I would shew what men cannot do in order to their salvation and in general men can do no part of the work of salvation. Whatsoever is properly any part of salvation is beyond their power – whether it be the imputation of their salvation by satisfaction for sin or purchasing salvation or whether it be the application of salvation in conversion, sanctification, and glorification.

The salvation of a sinner from the foundation to the top stone is the work of God. Every part of it is altogether beyond the power of a natural man. Men can do nothing towards saving themselves:

1. Men can't make any atonement for their sins ...
2. They can't purchase heaven ...
3. They can't convert themselves ... *And they can't work a gracious disposition into themselves; so they can't put forth any gracious act. The least act of grace is infinitely beyond their reach and out of their power.*
4. They can't oblige or dispose God to give them conversion ...
5. They can't do anything to fit themselves for Christ's acceptance ...
6. They have no power to do any thing to entitle themselves to any promise....<sup>197</sup>

Hence, 'owning to their want of disposition', the only hope for individuals, as well as their communities (which, if declension continued, then they could suffer the harsher spiritual judgment of apostasy), is to maintain 'the diligent and constant attendance' on all means.

According to Edwards' ontology, natural-man can at least 'abide' as an auditor of God's word out of self-preservation, fear, and self-regard – active manifestations of the 'self-love disposition'. Corresponding with God's communication to them 'according to their *nature* and *capacity*', Edwards advocates unregenerate seeking from 'an aversion to pain and desire of pleasure', though, to be sure, 'it is in no wise from a good principle.'<sup>198</sup>

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Edwards' appeal to the 'less noble' principles of self-love, namely, fear, self-preservation, and self-interest in his evangelistic approach to the unregenerate serves his Calvinist scheme well.

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<sup>194</sup> 'M'539, *Works*18, 86-87.

<sup>195</sup> See for example, Eccl. 9:10 (1733/4) and Ezek. 33:4-5 (1734/5).

<sup>196</sup> Ezek. 47:11 (1734).

<sup>197</sup> Ezek. 33:4-5 (1735/6).

<sup>198</sup> 'A'631, *Works*18, 158-59.



First, it preserves the sovereignty of God in the dispensing of salvation. Second, it retains the use and priority of the ordained means of salvation, namely, the word of God and preaching. And third, it approaches natural-man in accordance with the denunciatory pronouncements of Calvinism's anthropological assessment – man is spiritually dead in his sins and therefore morally and meritoriously unable to do anything cooperative toward salvation and, least of all, 'true worship'.

Edwards' thoughts on preparation, like so many things, were affected by the way he attempted to convey the idea of God's direct interaction with the world. As he rehearses God's work of redemption 'from the fall of man to the end of the world', we find that the natural-man and reprobate function, both at individual and collective levels, in a way that parallels repetitive stages in the work of redemption's constitutive history.<sup>199</sup> Just as the *historia salutis* develops along the lines of preparation, achievement, and application, so too the individual life is a microcosm of this work.

The 'heathen' nations also take part collectively in the grand scheme of redemption history. Their knowledge of certain religious truths serves to prepare former reprobate nations for the application of regenerating grace. Conversely, their present rejection of the Messiah accounts for Edwards' negative theological assessment, as he holds the natural-man fully culpable for failing in his moral and epistemic responsibilities. Their place in redemption history is then twofold: to further the work of redemption for future generations and to replicate the punitive aspects of God's inner actuality (which also serves as a warning to others and exhibits the justice of God in the process). Edwards' interest in non-Christian religions was, therefore, part of his spiritual mapping or tracing of God's movements toward redemption history's consummate end.

## **6. Concluding Remarks**

### **6.a. The Revealed God**

By constructing a science of history as an apologetic device, where universal history is used as an attempt 'to relate the sum of all God's works in providence', Edwards engages in the new production of a standardized and universally accessible type of religious knowledge. He purposely applies abstract theological and philosophical principles to every conceivable concrete, historical situation, in order to make the ethereal conceptually tangible for all, in all time. That is, by means of a redemption *narrative*, Edwards translates his panentheistic vision of the matrix of existence and makes it concrete, assessable, and meaningful. The God of Edwards is, therefore, no *deus absconditus*.

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<sup>199</sup> 'Sermon One', *Works*9, 116.



Because all participate in history and are subject to time, all have some point of contact with God's orchestration of the progress of redemption (some to their eternal benefit, others not), 'to accomplish the glory of the blessed Trinity in an exceeding degree'.<sup>200</sup> Consequently, all possess inherent value. The history of redemption is then the laboratory for examining *true religion's* interactions with surrounding peoples and cultures. Whether believer or unbeliever, the friend of the Christian religion or antagonist, all may read God's intentions in the mundane and remarkable accounts of history up to the present and, with the aid of scriptural prophecies, beyond the present.

In accord with his teaching in other places, elements of God's revealed glory may be known to the unregenerate, even the most deluded deist, simply by surveying history. But to know the truth of it, one must interpret it through the filter of redemption theology, which Edwards eagerly supplies. The full, spiritual glory, however, remains known and sensible to the regenerate only.

Edwards' evangelistic strategy of contextualizing the individual's existence historically rests heavily upon the time-honored principle that the acquisition of knowledge is indissociable from the training of minds. The effects of the Awakenings and other social and religious changes prompted Edwards' teaching the minds of Northampton and New England, Calvinists and deists, believer and unbeliever alike, to view all time as pregnant with eternal implications and spiritual significance. This point is pressed upon his auditors and readers, to view time and history as Edwards specifies, lest they perish through the delusion of a merely ethical, that is to say, deistic view of time and space.

In the Redemption Discourse, Edwards shows us where his theological investigations for a methodology have climaxed. It was to be upon the foundation of the Trinitarian *pactum salutis* for self-glorification, identifiable by the triadic preparation, achievement, realization pattern, that Edwards would refine his theology for the remaining years of his life. 'M'1062 and the 'Essay on the Trinity' exemplify the continuance of this method, which was to have found complete expression in the *magnum opus*, prevented only by his death.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> *Works*9, 125.

<sup>201</sup> William J. Scheick, however, does not read JE's *History* in this way. In his article, 'The Grand Design', instead of viewing Edwards' methodology in the series from the whole (*pactum salutis*) to the particular (the redemption of individual saints), Scheick believes JE, captive to the Puritan psychologized morphology of conversion model, projects the subjective dimension of conversion's application onto the collective Work of Redemption (300-14). The scheme works in reverse, from the minute to the grand, and is supposedly what JE intended by 'a body of divinity in an entire new method' (*Works*16, 727). Contrary to Scheick's opinion, JE employs the analogy opposite to many of his Puritan fathers, precisely because he was acutely aware of the distinction between the subjective side of redemption and the objective side (see Wilson, 'EI', *Works*9, 100). JE worked toward the realization of this project by drafting an outline, compiling notes, collecting materials, and revising portions of the Redemption Discourse in his private notebooks. The threefold categorization of the *historia salutis* was to be retained and expanded. As sermon notebook '45' (e.g. pp. 9, 14, 41) and 'Notebook 10' (e.g. proposed chapter four within 'Notebook 10' [as part of a three notebook series, 10,



The decisive significance of his interpretation of redemption from the whole to the particular shows his appreciation of the nature of human existence as inevitably historical, subjacent, and dependent upon sovereign divine dispensations. Immediately after his atypical conversion and early into his ministerial career he struggled with traditional Puritan preparationism as an element only being interpreted *within* the whole.<sup>202</sup> This raised long-term pastoral concerns for Edwards. Preparation was confined to the subjective appropriation of redemption. Certainly pastoral psychology was a significant factor in understanding the process, but the outworkings of redemption could not be founded upon such theologically and philosophically inept premises. Preparation was not an objective principle beyond its inclusion within the individual morphological pattern of conversion, which was taught from the Scriptures by his Puritan forefathers – something Edwards seriously questioned for a time. Now, however, he finds the reality and authenticity for the conversion model not only in Scripture, but also in the necessity and pattern of redemption history (from the perspective of the present), and the reasonableness (according to the ‘fitness’) of divine ordering. Consequently, he does not believe he is artificially employing or superimposing the preparation/achievement/realization model onto the individual conversion scheme. Rather, he is convinced that he has found the objective foundation of the preparationist scheme that legitimizes and requires its usage through his analysis of the eternal Trinitarian confederation, the revelation of Scripture, and the patterns and continuity of redemption history.

#### 6.b. *A Kinder, Gentler Jonathan Edwards*

McDermott and Morimoto repeatedly attempt to convince their readers that Edwards—supposedly so troubled by deistic complaints that the supralapsarian God is capricious and cruel—followed Turretin and Mastricht in an infralapsarian approach to soteriology, so that he might soften the harsh realities of determinism.<sup>203</sup> Unfounded as this may be, both scholars fail to note the larger point that the *ordo salutis* within Edwards’ theocentric system is itself a

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25, and 2, devoted to the *History* project] was to address the issue of ‘preparation’ in the Work of Redemption) show preparation’, again, was to hold a prominent place, with ascending movements to ‘achievement’ and ‘realization’, analogous to the *History*. Scheick’s thesis is simply counter to all extent evidence, as well as the theocentric impetus in Edwards’ thought.

<sup>202</sup> JE mentions the problem of his conversion in the *PN*, where he notes the conspicuous absence of the more axiomatic elements of the preparationist pattern of subjective phenomena, particularly, conviction by ‘legal fear’, terrors leading to contrition, and humiliation. The spiritual troubles relating to his own conversion experience are further recorded in the *Diary*: ‘The reason why I, in the least question my interest in God’s love and favor, is - 1. Because I cannot speak so fully to my experience of that preparatory work, of which divines speak: - 2. I do not remember that I experienced regeneration, exactly in those steps, in which divines say it is generally wrought’ (*Works* 16, 773-74). A year later, JE intimates a skeptical conclusion to his self-evaluation over-against the parameters of Puritan preparationism. Assured of the instantaneousness of conversion, he now resolves to critically uncover the foundations of why ‘the people of New England, and anciently the Dissenters of Old England ... used to be converted in those steps’ in order to establish a more objective foundation for the nature of conversion (779).

<sup>203</sup> See Holmes’ excellent rehearsal of the ‘lapsarian debate’ in this connection (*God of Grace*, 126-28).



product of the *pactum salutis* and its ‘hyper-supralapsarian’ proposals. God gets His glory: salvation/damnation are His methods; election/reprobation are His means.<sup>204</sup>

Despite their scholarly efforts, the Jonathan Edwards of Morimoto and McDermott bears little resemblance to the eighteenth-century figure displaced from his pastoral charge for, among other things, restricting access to the sacraments and publicly upbraiding children of prominent churchwardens for their unregenerate behavior. Instead of conducting himself like John McLeod Campbell, who, for the accommodating benefit of his parishioners, began to reassess confessional substitutionary soteriology in terms of a universalistic work of supererogation by Christ, Edwards underwent the rejection of his ministerial charge partly because of his increasingly restrictivistic opinions concerning the scope of the covenant and its associated privileges. Plainly, Edwards neither desired nor was in need of an inclusivist or Universalist scheme. Indeed, he was convinced that the resolute defense and espousal of particularism was in fact the defense and espousal of unalterable divine truth.<sup>205</sup>

For Edwards, adherence to true biblical theology and an authentic Christian worldview included submitting one’s self to the fact that God promotes that glory in two ways: redemption *and* damnation.

Over a century later, W.G.T. Shedd and other Northern Presbyterians gained fame for their articulation of a virtual, saving faith, but not Edwards. While Shedd and others believed in a ‘larger hope’ outside of gospel proclamation, Edwards did not.<sup>206</sup> For Edwards, the heathen world beyond the compass of gospel means ‘is like a sinking ship.’<sup>207</sup> He was part of an earlier orthodox tradition not embarrassed about the confessional doctrines that say that those who die unevangelized or unconverted are destined to eternal damnation.<sup>208</sup> He did not attempt to lay out a new paradigm to suggest anything otherwise. Instead, he attempted to theoretically buttress his own restrictivist tradition – amidst an Enlightenment assault on his own confessional tradition – through philosophical considerations of the aesthetic dimension/potential of double particular predestination and eternal damnation.

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<sup>204</sup> ‘The End of the Wicked Contemplated by the Righteous’ (1733), *Banner-Works*, 2:207-12.

<sup>205</sup> Hence, statements like: ‘The glory of God [is] ... of greater consequence than the welfare of thousands and millions of souls’ (ibid., 209).

<sup>206</sup> Shedd, *Calvinism: Pure and Mixed*, 116-31.

<sup>207</sup> ‘M’520, *Works*18, 66.

<sup>208</sup> See his most protracted meditation in defense of hell and reprobation in the 1755 essay ‘The Endless Punishment of Those Who Die Impenitent’ in *Worcester-Works*, 620-42. Fiering notes: ‘It is significant that these definitive statements on hell were written at approximately the same time that Edwards was working on *Original Sin* and *Two Dissertations (True Virtue and The End for Which God Created the World)*. All four problems were closely related in Edwards’s system’ (*Moral Thought*, 238-39 n.107).



## Conclusion

### *Peculiar Particularism in Edwards*

Throughout the preceding chapters I have conducted my presentation of Jonathan Edwards' philosophical anthropology operating on his premise that God designs and orders all things for the ultimate end for which He aims, the glorification of His own perfections. For Edwards, this was reality as spiritually envisioned and rationally articulated from a Spirit-conferred, biblically informed, theocentric perspective.

We have seen that in 'M'581, for example, Edwards explicitly states that all things are telic-oriented to function according to God's design and plan to the end He wills to obtain, and that 'Even sin and wickedness itself, it comes to pass because God has a use for it, a design and purpose to be accomplished by it.'<sup>1</sup> Natural-men and reprobates were found to be vital, if not necessary elements to the self-replication of God's beautiful being – Edwards' metaphysical system not only possessing a legitimate and coherent place for the reprobate but his theological system doing so as well, contrary to the opinions of, most notably, Stephen R. Holmes, Michael J. McClymond, John E. Colwell, as well as others.

Edwards' position on dispositions also has been stated and set forth before the reader with particular reference to his employment of dispositional concepts in the spheres of ontology, aetiology, timology, epistemology, theology, and in the last chapter, soteriology. Though our study has not been exhaustive, yet it has offered important corrections to the substantially contributive work of Sang Hyun Lee (esp. within Chapters II and III) and the more contentious views of Anri Morimoto and Gerald R. McDermott.

A vision of God as an all-comprehensive, telic-oriented being, who, for His own glory, replicates the most fundamental, affectional image or idea He has of Himself, namely, as Savior and Judge, in the minds of other dispositionally constituted intelligent perceiving beings, were the central Edwardsean concepts which I attempted to highlight and explicate through the course of five chapters.

These ideas, as I have argued and evidenced, are Jonathan Edwards' ideas, the 'world according to Edwards'.

But such ideas warrant comment from outside of the intriguing 'world according to Edwards'. Which is what I intend to do in these closing pages, under the following three headings: 'The Attractiveness of Jonathan Edwards as a Philosophical-Theologian'; 'The Unattractiveness of Jonathan Edwards as a Philosophical-Theologian'; and, 'Edwards and the Rationalistic Method of the Enlightenment'.

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<sup>1</sup> *Works*18, 117.



## *The Attractiveness of Jonathan Edwards as a Philosophical-Theologian*

What may make this eighteenth-century Puritan thinker attractive to twenty-first-century philosophical-theologians and systematicians, that is, beyond the curiosity of his legendary ministry and famed works such as *Freedom of the Will* and the Enfield sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*,<sup>2</sup> are simply these three words: order, purpose, and meaning. Edwards's system is all about God ordering the world with a specific purpose in mind, which, in turn, invests it with significance and value. So where Bertrand Russell unapologetically announces that, (*q.d.*) 'the world is just there, and that is all there is to say,'<sup>3</sup> Edwards hastens adds one more word – 'because'.

Post-Enlightenment critics might very well upbraid Calvinism's particularism, but they cannot say that Edwards, inasmuch as he stood as a representative of Reformed theology, repudiated the inherent value of human beings as such. Edwards has an answer for the existence of both categories of human being—one that causes many minds to recoil—but an answer nonetheless. This speaks to another dimension of his thinking that may resonate with contemporary minds: the suggested comprehensiveness of his system of order and meaning.

In the same way that Edwards' God is 'all-encompassing', so too the theoretical scope of his vision of reality incorporates all existences and occurrences within its purview. There is no such thing as a renegade molecule in Edwards' theistic universe; in fact, there is no such thing as a single atom without God willing it to be so, and for some 'suitable' reason.

This translates over into the intelligibility and collective unity of every aspect of reality, since the world exists to communicate something, specifically, something about God and His relation to man. With that said, it would not be inappropriate to speak of a principal metaphor for Edwards' typological universe in a way that juxtaposed Jorge Luis Borges' description of the universe as the 'Library of Babylon' (an informative world of numerous bits of data, that has no center, cannot be navigated, and possesses no unifying principle).<sup>4</sup> For Edwards, the 'Book[s] of Nature'<sup>5</sup>—the created natural order in its minutiae and general assemblages—do not fill the 'Library of Babylon' but the 'Library of Zion', God's universe. Extending the metaphor further, the 'Library of Zion' may be said to envision the universe as a repository of information, of revelation; and, in turn, represent life as an activity of retrieving (receiving) and interpreting information about God and, secondarily, man, and responding (remanating) with the appropriate affections. The fact that, for Edwards, time and space are not barriers to this information but rather vehicles of accommodation, lend the world and existence an

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<sup>2</sup> (Boston, 1741), preached at Enfield, Connecticut 8 July 1741.

<sup>3</sup> See Russell's argument on infinity and existence in *The Principles of Mathematics*, 358-59, as well as his argument against theistic teleology/cosmology in 'A Free Man's Worship' in *Mysticism and Logic*.

<sup>4</sup> Borges, *Labyrinths*, 51-58.

<sup>5</sup> MS title page of 'Images of Divine Things', reproduced in *Works* 11, 50.



internal coherence and rhythm, despite its complexity and at times apparent cacophony. Experience has its place, but so does propositional objectivity. In a world of uncertainty, fragmentation, and flux, Edwards' system may indeed appear confident, unified, and stable.

From the beginning of his ministerial and literary career, Edwards grounded his metaphysical ruminations upon primary doctrines such as the being and will of God, the Trinity, and the scheme of redemption: these were the *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* of his thinking processes. Which is to say, that these doctrines were essential to his desire to find *unity*, a fundamental unity for all existence. Topics such as infused grace, true virtue, original sin, human nature, Christian ethic, love, faith, existence, and holiness, all of which were articulated and philosophically buttressed by Edwards through the principles and logic of disposition, therefore have an antecedent theological basis. Indeed, these topics were so interrelated that Edwards planned to unfold them within 'the affair of Christian theology, as the whole of it, in each part, stands in reference to the great work of redemption by Jesus Christ', not as philosophical appendages, but as 'divine doctrines' of a single 'body of divinity in an entirely new method'.<sup>6</sup>

And while Edwards does not speak to every objection or state his position on every doctrine or apologetical issue in his extant written corpus, yet in light of how he viewed his own work,<sup>7</sup> to think that his projected *magnum opus* would have separated his speculative philosophy from his theology, or his ethics from his aesthetic and dispositional theory of being, or omitted a doctrine of reprobation or even preparation, would be to argue that he was planning a non-Edwardsean body of divinity, devoid of the unity and comprehensiveness characteristic of his philosophical-theology. It was the sheer fascination of the proposed unity and comprehensiveness of that never-to-be-completed treatise that attracted myself, and no doubt will continue to attract others, to the genius of one who not merely exercised himself as a metaphysician, but as a 'Calvinist metaphysician'.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, as Elwood, Smith, McClymond, Fiering, and others have suggested, it may really be with an eighteenth-century New England Puritan and not Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) or Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55),<sup>9</sup> that we find the first modern attempt to write a theology, even a major systematic treatment of theology, from a particularly philosophical perspective. And even though that attempt never materialized, yet Edwards' efforts are exemplified throughout his surviving notebooks and

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<sup>6</sup> *Works* 16, 727-28. See McClymond, 'If There Had Been No Vaccination' on JE's 'new method'.

<sup>7</sup> The interrelatedness of topics is particularly evident within the treatises written at Stockbridge, the 'Book of Controversies' notebooks, and *HWR*.

<sup>8</sup> Quote from Bebbington, 'Remembered Around the World'.

<sup>9</sup> Hegel (1770-1831) has been omitted for two reasons. First, although he studied theology at Tübingen, one cannot really describe him as a theologian. His writings even when on religion are essentially philosophical. Second, though he did exercise considerable influence on theology in the nineteenth century, it is really in the twentieth century that one finds major writers in systematics utilizing Hegel.



published treatises to ensure, as they have for me, future interest in Jonathan Edwards as a resource for philosophical-theology, and not merely as an antiquarian novelty.

Edwards' philosophical-theology should not only be engaging, but also potentially useful for not only moral theorists interested in 'virtue ethics', but especially contemporary evangelical theologians defending 'classical' pronouncements of the doctrine of God over-against evangelical 'open theists' and inclusivists. Edwards' strong determinist and particularist position speaks to contemporary advocates of divine passibility and openness, in that he makes an interesting, if not internally coherent, case for the planned and purposed expression of God's various attributes by the concept of remanation through human agents. Dispositions offer an explanation of the relative 'freedom' and individualized uniqueness of human responses, struggles, knowledge, and existence, but also the mechanism by which God programmatically prescribes the kind of decisions humans make.

Following the logic of Edwards' dispositional ontology will not take one down the Morimoto-McDermott path of inclusivity or universalism, but a path leading to the same restrictivist position as the Westminster divines. Edwards, like Calvin and the tradition called by his name, championed the essential arbitrariness (omnisapience) of God's power, His inalienable, incontestable right to save or condemn whosoever He pleases. If for nothing else, then, the possibilities of Edwards' dispositional philosophical-theology may have intellectual value for the maintenance of evangelical particularism.

### ***The Unattractiveness of Jonathan Edwards as a Philosophical-Theologian***

But the same things that might make Edwards attractive to some contemporary thinkers are precisely what may render him an anachronism to others. His self-contained metaphysical system, in which he must have a 'rational' answer or at least an explanation for everything, would not suit most within today's postmodern climate. His passion for systematic unity and comprehensiveness, to have a reasonable solution for every doctrine of Christianity, including the incarnation, the internal relations of the Triune Godhead, and even God as God is in Himself, tend to strip all notions of mystery and inscrutability from sacred things.

This conjures up images of Jonathan Edwards as somewhat presumptuous, impervious, and egotistical – character and intellectual assessments that have appeared in contemporary biographical accounts, and not without justification.<sup>10</sup> Aside from clashes with parishioners, Robert Breck and his associates, the Williams family in Stockbridge, and Old Light

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Levin, 'Edwards, Franklin, and Cotton Mather' in *American Experience*, 34-49; Stout, 'The Puritans and Edwards' in *American Experience*, 142-59; and Jones, 'The Impolitic Mr. Edwards', 64-79.



Calvinists, which in every case Edwards thought himself not only in the right but also generally above reproach, there was the whole epistemological issue: Edwards claimed to ‘see’ things as they really were—spiritual and moral—and offer on behalf of confessional Protestantism an objective response to the Enlightenment worldview. And while notable philosophers such as William J. Wainwright have powerfully argued for the warrant and plausibility of Edwards’ epistemic perspective, yet the spiritual sense was still something Edwards intimates that he grasped and experienced well beyond others, thereby making himself the authority on the matter. Hence, he took the responsibility upon himself to discriminate what did and what did not qualify as authentic religious experience and affections in *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741), *Some Thoughts concerning the present Revival of Religion in New-England, and the Way in which it ought to be acknowledged and promoted* (1742), *A Treatise concerning Religious Affections* (1746), and ‘Directions for Judging of Persons’s Experiences’ (n.d.). Without coming out and saying it, he seems to suggest that if one did not subscribe to the ‘world according to Edwards’, then one remained outside the ‘world according to God.’

Not least of all, Edwards’ radical theocentricity, for all the value and significance it may ascribe to the natural-man and reprobate, still does present an attractive portrait of God in many respects. Thinking of the New Testament emphasis not on causal determination and divine arbitrariness, but rather divine love and condescension, Thomas Chalmers once remarked: ‘I should like to be so inspired over again [as I was when I read *Freedom of the Will*], but with such a view of the Deity as coalesced and was in harmony with the doctrine of the New Testament.’<sup>11</sup> Some might see Chalmers’ criticism of causality and theodicy spilling over into the sphere of soteriology: Edwards’ rigidly defined parameters for what constitutes dispositional regeneration simply not allowing for the possibility of inclusivity. As we have seen, he does not divorce regeneration from conversion, nor conversion from God’s ordained means, and even then he is pessimistic about covenantal inclusivity and therefore baptism. Consequently, there is little hope for infants (or children) who die in infancy, and none for those who hope for salvation by proxy or by the hypothetical retention of an unexercised gracious disposition.

Then there is Edwards’ aesthetic vision of God as complexly beautiful. Setting aside the difficult issue of divine simplicity, there is something profoundly unsettling about ontological ‘irregularities’ in God’s beautiful being. I think of the recent acts of violence by terrorists upon the United States and wonder how one would even attempt to explain the death of three thousand unsuspecting citizens in terms of God’s complex beauty? Moreover, I remain

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Hanna, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Chalmers*, 1:17.



perplexed over what the pastoral value of such a theory could possibly be, since Edwards offers no explanation or practical use for these ideas.

Concerning the more common atrocities of the death of non-Christian children in non-Christian cultures and religions, Edwards' aesthetic analysis of reality and existence comes off both as insensitive and insulting when it categorizes the lives of such children as ontological 'deformities'. The discomfort of such thoughts are only reinforced when one considers that their eternal destiny consists of the intensification of perceptions and sensibilities of divine wrath for the express purpose of intensifying the full manifestation/replication of the Divine Being.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, some would find the aesthetic philosophical augmentation of Edwards' Calvinistic particularism better left unsaid.

### ***Edwards and the Rationalistic Method of the Enlightenment***

Prominent in our consideration of both the attractiveness and unattractiveness of Jonathan Edwards as a philosophical-theologian is his commitment to the Reformed tradition. Which brings us to this: for all of his commitment to confessional Calvinism, was Edwards after all tarred with the Enlightenment rationalism of his age, and if so, in what way?

The fact that Edwards was not indifferent to philosophical concerns, but imbibed Neoplatonic elements from Henry More, occasionalistic concepts from Malebranche, Scottish aestheticism from Hutcheson and Shaftesbury, metaphysical peculiarities from Smith and Norris, as well as a host of epistemological principles from Locke, and adapted them all within his Berkeley-like idealism to address the burning issues of his day concerning the mind, the will, causality, and universal order, points us in the direction of an affirmative answer.<sup>13</sup> Couple this statement with his first idea and methodological approach toward a *magnum opus* – 'A Rational Account of Christianity, or, The Perfect Harmony between the Doctrines of the Christian Religion and Human Reason',<sup>14</sup> and we have, for all intents and purposes, an Enlightenment rationalist who just so happens to be a devout Congregational minister. Or so it would seem.

For although early on Edwards subscribed to the Cambridge Platonist and Lockean notion that religion must conform to the principles of reason in order to be viable and valid, and thought that since God's program of self-glorification was so lucid and reasonable in his own mind, that such things could be conveyed through a systematic 'Rational Account of

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<sup>12</sup> 'M'662: 'It was meet that [God's] attributes and perfections should be expressed. It was the will of God that they should be expressed and shine forth. But if the expressions of his attributes [like wrath] ben't known, they are not; the very being of the expression depends on the perception of created understandings. And so much the more as the expression is known, so much the more it is' (*Works*16, 200).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Oberdiek, 'Jonathan Edwards' in *The Spirit of American Philosophy*, ed. Smith, 194.

<sup>14</sup> MS 'Catalogue Letter' (Beinecke Library). Cf. 'Outline of "A Rational Account"', *Works*6, 396.



Christianity', and that he himself should be the first in New England to compose such a treatise to prove 'that the present fashionable divinity [i.e. deism (Arminianism is implied)] is wrong,'<sup>15</sup> yet one must bear in mind that just prior to the Great Awakening of 1740 Edwards abandoned this methodological project to take up another. This change in tactics signaled an important shift in his apologetical engagement with Enlightenment religion, as well as his opinion of the best method for 'doing' theology.

The 'Rational Account' itself is an enduring testimony to the influence the Enlightenment's high view of reason had upon Edwards. The fact that he clung to this vision of a 'Rational Account' for nearly twenty years indicates that he considered the rationalistic method the cornerstone of his mental powers. One might add that Edwards himself may have been overly confident in his own intellectual abilities to accomplish such a monumental task, indeed, if such a task were possible through mere 'ratiocination'.

In 1739, Edwards must have been asking himself this same question as he prepared and preached the sermons series that was to become *The History of the Work of Redemption*, and while he continued to refine his thoughts on 'divine and supernatural light' – the spiritual perception of 'divine excellency'.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the 1730s, Edwards was moving more and more toward the final conviction that the truth of Christianity was ultimately grounded not in human reason but in the perception of divine 'excellency' conveyed by the 'new spiritual sense'. The first series of awakening that took place in the mid-1730s turned his attention to analyzing what took place in conversion. His conclusions, in large measure (and not surprisingly), confirmed the instantaneousness of regeneration/justification and the accent on the beautiful and affections, which he himself experienced fifteen years earlier. Certainly there was room for a variety of different experiences. Indeed, no two conversion experiences may be alike, though almost all share the same imprint of heteronomous preparations.<sup>17</sup> Notwithstanding, 'divine and supernatural light' must be 'immediately imparted to the soul, by the Spirit of God', according to Edwards.<sup>18</sup> The excellency that the light conveyed was itself regenerative. The aesthetic vision was a mental state, a consequence of union with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. It afforded to the redeemed a 'view' of the reality of spiritual things, which unregenerates have no access. Consequently, as Ava Chamberlain explains,

This higher form of conviction was ultimately unavailable for public discussion, for to the unredeemed who lack the perception of excellency, talk about it is 'foolishness' and 'words without a meaning' [*M*'683]. A purely rational defense of Christian doctrine would have required

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<sup>15</sup> '*M*'832, *Works*18, 546. Chamberlain, 'EI', *Works*18, 27; cf. Aldridge, 'Natural Religion and Deism in America before Ethan Allen and Thomas Paine', 835-48.

<sup>16</sup> '*M*'782, *Works*18, 452-66.

<sup>17</sup> See Goen, 'EI', *Works*4, 25-32; and Valeri, 'EI', *Works*17, 7-13.

<sup>18</sup> 'A Divine and Supernatural Light', *Works*17, 408-26.



Edwards to use, as did the latitudinarians in their anti-deist polemic, the standard of rationality advocated by his opponents.<sup>19</sup>

To avoid this ‘tactical mistake’ he moved away from a systematic defense based upon rationality to a historical defense based upon biblical prophecy and the testimony of redemption history, i.e. the history of the world ‘both sacred and profane.’

The diminished status of ratiocination and the corresponding rise of a historical method suggest that Edwards was not the thoroughgoing Enlightenment rationalist one might suspect, at least not in the last two decades of his life. To be sure, his historical method was altogether bound to rational arguments, but the *reason* he became attracted to a historical method was not due to its coherent organization and logic, but because it was ‘the most beautiful’ and ‘fitting’ method.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Edwards had finally surrendered his intellectual prowess to the logic of divine arbitrariness. Indeed, as ‘M’1263 makes certain, the doctrine of divine arbitrariness completely supplanted ratiocination as the operating principle of his theocentric perspective, and no doubt it would have been the regulating principle of his *magnum opus*. The process of surrendering to God’s sovereignty may have begun some time during the spring of 1721, but it took almost another twenty years for Edwards to realize that human reason itself was an arbitrary convention of God, and that human reason itself must yield to God’s arbitrary will.

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<sup>19</sup> Chamberlain, ‘EI’, *Works*18, 30.

<sup>20</sup> ‘To the Trustees of the College of New Jersey’, *Works*16, 728. There is no doubt, however, that JE retained his concern for preserving the older categories of order, unity and harmony, as well as the spirituality of the Christian religion, amidst the ‘crisis’ of European intellectuality. As I indicated in a preceding section, I believe JE was to some extent successful at both.



## Appendix A

### *Panentheistic, but not Process Thought*

In some ways it may appear that Jonathan Edwards' proposal of a self-enlarging Being mirrors process thought. Douglas J. Elwood, for one, not only found Edwards' philosophical theology panentheistic (as do I), but also showing affinities with process thought. According to Elwood, Edwards' Neoplatonism relates 'God and the world in a relationship of mutual immanence,' as God 'comprehended his own creation' without the use of 'secondary causes.' To which he concludes that Edwards really anticipates the panentheism of Charles Hartshorne and others.<sup>1</sup>

Elwood can hardly be blamed thinking thus (even though he strangely couples panentheism instead of pantheism with Neoplatonism), for there are a number of similarities between Edwards and process thought. For one thing, process theology attempts to portray God's being as at once complete or eternal. So does Edwards. But, unlike Edwards, process theologians have God engaged in becoming by promoting a dipolar nature of the divine being.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, the process perspective presents God's primordial or conceptual side as changelessly complete (not unlike what Edwards would say), while on the other hand it characterizes God's consequent or concrete nature as an ongoing process of becoming – something distinctly foreign to Edwards. To him, God's being or existence cannot be viewed as the end of creation. The reason for this, according to Edwards, is that the Divine Being should be conceived as 'prior to any of God's acts or designs.' God's being and existence must be presupposed as the ground of God's acts or design. Therefore, Edwards writes,

He [God] can't create the world to the end that he may have existence; or may have such attributes and perfections, and such an essence.<sup>3</sup>

Edwards makes it clear that God's essence, attributes, perfections, or existence cannot be viewed as the 'end of creation'. Since God's being and attributes are already perfect and actual, the Divine Being cannot be seen as the result of or constituted by an ongoing world process: God is not 'becoming' in any essential sense. Rather, the creation is a mode of *expression* and *perspectival expansion* for God.

An apparent second likeness between Edwards and process thought lies in their metaphysical foundations. Just as process theology receives shape from process philosophy's

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<sup>1</sup> Elwood, *PTJE*, 22, 53; 24-29.

<sup>2</sup> Most process theology is grounded in the process theism derived from Alfred N. Whitehead's (1861-1947) notion that God is the primary example of metaphysical truths as well as the one who supplies the initial direction to every event. The primacy of events is the central element to his original metaphysical system; see his, *Process and Reality*. Charles Hartshorne was the first to develop a complete process philosophical theology, detailing a full concept of God 'in process;' see his, *The Divine Relativity*; cf. Pittenger, 'The Last Things' in a Process Perspective.

<sup>3</sup> *EofC*, Works 8, 469.



conception of reality, so too Edwards' theology is largely shaped by his philosophical conception of reality. However, the principal difference is that process theology's philosophical conception of reality as inherently processive compromises the completeness and transcendence of God's own perfect actuality (especially with regards to divine knowledge and timelessness<sup>4</sup>), thereby rendering God's actuality a part or instance of the general process of reality, while Edwards, on the other hand, maintains the classical theistic position of God's unchangeability and self-sufficiency, yet with this improvement: God, as an essentially perfect actuality, exercises a disposition to repeat that actuality '*ad extra*', or, which is the same thing for Edwards, *in* the minds of created intelligences. For him, the movement of God's glorification in the temporal realm and human history is never God's self-realization, as in Hegel's philosophy of the 'Absolute Spirit' or process theology.<sup>5</sup> Again, in process theology, God is not only given to movement but also is 'in process' toward his own self-realization, while for Edwards, God's self-enlargement *is* God's self-replication, that is, the replication and manifestation in the historical process of what is already fully actual within the inner Trinity: for God's innertrinitarian life is completely exercised through the innertrinitarian relationships,<sup>6</sup> the divine disposition is already apart from and prior to the creation *and* consummation of the world.

In an interesting 'Miscellanies' entry, Edwards contemplates why some philosophers and theologians struggle with or reject the doctrine of God's aseity and prior actuality and, rather, are given over to anthropocentric conceptions of God's existence:

'Tis from the exceeding imperfect notion that we have of the nature or essence of God, and because we can't think of it but we must think of it far otherwise than it is, that arises the

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<sup>4</sup> See, Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, who limits foreknowledge to avoid fatalism; Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God*, c.3, 'The Omniscience-Immutability Argument', who forcefully argues against 'timelessness' in the interests of a 'religiously available' God; and Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*, 142ff. Ward also limits divine omniscience for the reason that God cannot foreknow events as *actual* events prior to their occurrence. In citing these three, however, I am not categorically identifying them as process theologians. Although it has not been indicated thus far, I am sensitive to the significant and numerous differences between various strands of process thought among process theologians, open theists and philosophers, such as Gregory Boyd, John Cobb, Lewis Ford, David R. Griffin, R.E. James, Schubert Ogden, John Sanders, H.P. Owen, S. Sia, D.D. Williams, and others. My description of process/open theology and philosophy has been limited to the general themes characteristic to both. For responses opposing shared premises of 'process' thought see, Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*; Gruenler, *The Inexhaustible God*; Helm, *Eternal God*; Alvin Plantinga's essay, 'On Ockham's Way Out', 235-69; where he attempts to reconcile unlimited divine knowledge with human freedom; and Stumpf and Kretzmann's essay, 'Eternity' in *The Concept of God*, ed. Morris (219-52), where they defend a Boethian concept of a timeless, eternal God.

<sup>5</sup> Hegel, for instance, through the employment of his dialectic method of logic arrives at the concept of Absolute Idea, which he describes as Becoming, as a process of self-development. The *Idea* of which Hegel speaks is deduced in his logic by the same method that yielded Becoming out of Being. The Idea, however, contains its own dialectic, namely, life, cognition, and the Absolute Idea. Thus, Idea is the category of self-consciousness; it knows itself in its objects. The whole drift of Hegel's logic, therefore, has been to move from the initial concept of Being finally to the notion of the Idea. But this Idea must also be understood as being in a *dynamic process*, so that the Idea is itself in a continuous process of self-development toward self-perfection.

<sup>6</sup> See Lee, *Philosophical Theology*, c.7.



difficulty in our mind of conceiving of God's existence without a cause. 'Tis repugnant to the nature of our souls and what our faculties utterly refuse to admit that anything that is capable of being one part of a proper disjunction should exist and be as it is, rather than not exist or exist otherwise, without causes. Our notions we have of the divine nature are so imperfect that our imperfect idea admits of a disjunction, for whatsoever is not absolutely perfect doth so.<sup>7</sup>

Edwards goes on to say that even as we explore creation and God, in that order, we must operate on the supposition of divine 'absolute perfection.'

A further distinction between Edwards and process thought is that nearly the whole of Edwards' foundationalist, compatibilist, and deterministic (Calvinist) theological content—from his doctrines concerning the *pactum salutis* and eternally decreed *ordo salutis*, to the predetermined *historia salutis*—runs counter to process theology, where God is conceived to be, in one degree or other, processive and response oriented. Thus, Edwards himself, by virtue of three things, namely, (i) his position regarding the classical incommunicable attributes of God; (ii) his understanding of God's 'ad extra' replication being an ideal one; and, (iii) his inclusion of active dispositions in the being of God, prevents one from either reading him as a process theologian, or reading process thought back onto his theology or philosophy.

Yet, with that said, his statements concerning all in God and God in all cannot be taken any other way but panentheistically. Edwards wants the logical conclusions that follow from his analysis of God's relation to the creation, but he does not want to commit to pantheism. Panentheism, however, appears to be a whole other viable alternative for him, though throughout his career he struggles to curtail, in terms of language and conception, its consequence of temporalizing and spatializing God.

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<sup>7</sup> 'M'650, *Works*18, 190-91.



## Appendix B

### *Sufficient and Efficacious Grace*

In Edwards' scheme, the disposition of love to God is a grace sometimes called 'sufficient'. Predictably, 'sufficient grace' is distinguished from 'efficacious grace', which also may be identified with the disposition of love to God. The designation 'sufficient', however, does not indicate anything about its efficacy: sufficient grace is actual grace and, therefore, always efficacious in its application or exercise, in that its sufficiency flows from the infinite power and goodness of God. In this sense, it, like efficacious grace, comes under the traditional heading of 'special grace'.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Edwards denominates it 'sufficient' to specially qualify or distinguish it from 'efficacious grace', not in terms of a *type* or *kind* of grace, but *purposeful application* of the one source of actual grace, the Holy Spirit.

Sufficient grace, then, ought to be equated with the temporary and occasional grace of original righteousness, while efficacious grace is identical with the 'confirming grace' of 'M'290, in terms of an eternally unfaltering grace designated for a different divine purpose, namely, confirmation and glorification.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, sufficient grace is an internally present, actual grace effectually applied, *as God deems appropriate*, for a particular purpose in particular circumstances; while on the other hand, efficacious grace is a grace persistently applied for an enduring purpose. The former is intermittent and provisional, the latter unremitting and permanent. This is in perfect keeping with Edwards' concept of the weakly arbitrary, governing operation and influence of the Holy Spirit.

To be sure, this distinction between the two purposeful applications of the one source of grace immediately bears on Edwards' doctrine of concreation, which, in turn, makes it decisive in his attempt to reconcile the problem of Adam's first sin.

Some scholars, however, fail to appreciate Edwards' differentiation. John Gerstner and Charles S. Storms, for example, believe Edwards fails to make a real distinction between

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<sup>1</sup> Special grace is distinguished from common grace. Special grace, traditionally speaking, is the grace by which God redeems, sanctifies, and glorifies His people. Unlike common grace, which is universally given and not necessarily or intimately associated with the Person of the Holy Spirit, special grace is personal and personally bestowed only on those whom God elects.

<sup>2</sup> The 'efficacious grace' referred to here is quite similar to that in c. XXXII of the *Westminster Confession*: 'The souls of the righteous, being made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens ...'. What *makes* them 'perfect in holiness' is 'confirming' or 'efficacious grace'. Elsewhere within the *WCF*, 'efficacious grace' is distinguished from anything in fallen or regenerate humanity. Such efficacious grace which perseveres, preserves and translates the saints 'depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election,' and, in heaven, God conferring efficacious grace to his saints (c. XVII). On this point, the Westminster divines appear to be completely in accord with Augustine ('*De Corruptione et Gratia*' in *St. Augustine, Anti-Pelagian Writings, The Nicene Fathers*, ed. Schaff, 5, c. 26) and Calvin (*Institutes*, I.15.8), and JE in accord with all three. Initially it would appear that the similarity between Augustine and JE is uncanny; but while their notions of 'efficacious grace' or confirming grace (for Augustine, the grace of perseverance) were for all intents and purposes identical, their concepts of original righteousness differ.



confirming and sufficient grace. Gerstner, in particular, asserts that, 'If grace is truly sufficient it must be efficacious; if it is not efficacious it is not sufficient.'<sup>3</sup> Gerstner's case is built upon evidence from a MS sermon on Romans 5:6, where Edwards writes, 'Adam had sufficient assistance of God always present with him to have enabled him to have obeyed if he had used his natural abilities in endeavoring it'.<sup>4</sup> Gerstner objects and says that man's problem is always with his inclination and never with his natural ability. 'M'501 adds to his case, where Edwards continues: 'though the assistance was not such as it would have been after his confirmation to render it impossible for him to sin.'<sup>5</sup> Gerstner reads this and exclaims:

Edwards has a distinction here without a difference. He distinguishes between sufficient and efficacious or confirming grace, but there is no difference in his own psychology ... According to Edwards it was sufficient if the natural abilities were used; but it was not sufficient in itself at all. In other words it was not actually sufficient but conditionally or hypothetically sufficient; a very different thing.<sup>6</sup>

According to Gerstner, sufficient grace could not even be conditionally sufficient unless the grace was 'actual' which, he states, 'it was not, it could never be sufficient, for unless a man had efficacious grace he would not utilize his natural ability, to call on his "sufficient" grace'. To be sure, Adam did have the inclination to obey before he succumbed to the temptation but at the time of his evil capitulation he obviously did not, for only the inclination to the good would have been sufficient. Gerstner concludes by saying sufficient grace is a contradiction in terms; sufficient grace is insufficient; 'Only efficacious grace can be sufficient.'<sup>7</sup>

But Gerstner, Storms, and others, completely miss Edwards' meaning. Edwards knows that, by definition, *posse peccare* excludes efficacious, confirmatory grace, but gives place for some concept of sufficient grace. The question then is, what is sufficient about sufficient grace? For Edwards, the sufficiency of sufficient grace to (i) prevent man from sinning and (ii) to empower him to lovingly obey God lies in its *infused* and *irresistible* character. It is infused because it does not belong to the nature of man. For Adam, this infusion of the Spirit took place at his inception: hence, Edwards' doctrine of concreation precludes any notion of created grace whatsoever.<sup>8</sup> So, while he writes at length of the 'habit of grace', Edwards recognizes with Turretin that speaking 'physically' of grace as an infused disposition tends toward a naturalizing of the supernatural.<sup>9</sup> He therefore warns that when one describes grace as a disposition in Adam (or the saint for that matter), one must be careful not to turn the

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<sup>3</sup> *Rational Biblical*, 2:306.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Gerstner, *Rational Biblical*, 2:306.

<sup>5</sup> *Works* 18, 51.

<sup>6</sup> *Rational Biblical*, 2:306.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 306-07.

<sup>8</sup> While JE uses the Scholastic notion of 'infused grace', he is careful to distinguish it from Thomistic created grace. For a discussion on this point see Chapter V, §1.b, where I refute Anri Morimoto's claim that created grace is the disposition of love to God. Cf. Cherry, *A Reappraisal*, 34-39.

<sup>9</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:510-17.



principle into ‘a natural disposition to act grace’.<sup>10</sup> He argues that grace, as a disposition, though it is vitally united to man’s faculties, does not become man’s own natural principle, but rather the ‘perfection and excellency’ of the soul is connected with ‘the will of God, and is dependent on nothing else’.<sup>11</sup> Which is to say, the Spirit is (weakly) arbitrary in the manner of His ingenerated governance. Man does not govern the Spirit, but the Spirit man. The superior principle of holiness, righteousness, and virtue, are the foundation that the soul has *beyond* itself though internally related to itself through participation. Consequently, as Conrad Cherry states it: ‘the habit of grace remains grace: it is not given over to human control.’<sup>12</sup>

Sufficient grace, therefore, is no weak grace; it is every bit as much actual grace as ‘efficacious grace’. The only different is in the divine application of grace: when God the Holy Spirit exercises His gracious influence and operation, it is sufficient to its ends. This is a question of *if* and *when*. When the Spirit exercises Himself constantly, per His covenantal obligations, it is continuously efficacious. Either way, infused grace, when applied, assists ‘the natural powers’ as ‘they work together’ (*Mp*) to *irresistibly* obtain a divinely desired purpose: for, in the words of Edwards, ‘what God’s Spirit doth, he doth; he doth so much as he doth, or he causeth in the soul so much as he causeth, let that be how little soever.’<sup>13</sup> Divine assistance, therefore, is always efficacious to do that which He intends to assist; that is, ‘[if and] when God assists, he assists to all that he intends to assist to.’<sup>14</sup>

Edwards could have averted the later confusion of Gerstner, Storms, and others, if only he had employed a more descriptive designation for sufficient grace. But Edwards has never been known for original terminology, only reinventing the meaning of established terms. As a result, commentators must be conscious of which preexisting kind of ‘sufficient grace’ Edwards is taking the liberty to nuance in his definition of original righteousness. In a division of internal actual grace, sufficient grace is used either to mean (1) grace that gives sufficient ability to perform a salutary act, prescinding from the result (grace efficacious with the efficacy of power); or (2) purely sufficient grace, which does not obtain a good, free act, but gives power to produce one – grace inefficacious in the production of a good, free act.

Obviously Edwards does not precisely mean ‘sufficient’ in the first sense because it falls right into the unresolved Roman Catholic distinction between graces ‘proximately’ and ‘remotely’ sufficient for a good act;<sup>15</sup> and by definition it is ultimately efficacious. The second option, purely sufficient grace (inefficacious), is such grace which gives full power to perform

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<sup>10</sup> *Treatise*, 55.

<sup>11</sup> ‘M’481, *Works*13, 523-24.

<sup>12</sup> *A Reappraisal*, 37.

<sup>13</sup> ‘M’15, *Works*13, 208.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Grace is proximately sufficient if it gives sufficient power to perform the act without addition aid, or, in other words, it is efficacious in and of itself; while grace is said to be remotely sufficient if for such and such a thing if further aid is needed, whereupon it is again efficacious.



a good, free act, even in the presence of contrary difficulties, but which lacks the effect due to the will's resistance. If Edwards meant this, he would have to respond to the following issues:

1. Would not 'the will's resistance' be considered a 'contrary difficulty' to which 'full power' is sufficiently given to the agent for overcoming?
2. Would not this grace fundamentally be given for the empowerment of the agent's 'whole will'?
3. The problem of answering Gerstner's criticism that, '[sufficient grace] could not even be conditionally sufficient, for unless the grace was actual ... it never could be sufficient, for unless a man had efficacious grace he would not utilize his natural ability, to call on his "sufficient grace."' So that in the end, it is always insufficient and really not actual grace at all.
4. Purely sufficient grace was not recognized by the Reformers or the Jansenists. Both acknowledged no other grace but efficacious grace only. For both the Reformers and the Jansenists even grace relatively sufficient was efficacious.<sup>16</sup>
5. The definition of 'purely sufficient grace' is juxtaposed to sufficient grace as actual, infused and irresistible.

But Edwards does not deal with these issues because he fundamentally alters what 'sufficient grace' historically means, as well as how it is used. He could say that the grace Adam possessed was sufficient for *all* temptations – because in terms of efficacy, it was. Instead, he says that it would have been sufficient *if* exercised. It really has nothing to do with man's natural ability in the sense Gerstner intends. Certainly man had the ability, *even* the moral ability. But the crux, for Edwards, concerns the *governing* of the mind's essential disposition and natural inclination: *that* is the issue. In each and every moment of his existence, Adam's self-love disposition functioned in accord with its telic prescription – not in a sinful way, but naturally. It required the governing disposition of love to God to make any motion of the mind truly virtuous. Sufficient grace is not really conditional upon the cooperation of Adam. Thus, man's dependence on the power of God is not only for the announcement of his original status and righteousness, but also for the disposing of the soul toward holiness and the performance of it: 'Man was dependent on the power of God in his first estate ... It was an effect of the power of God to make men holy at the first ... and it was an effect of God's power to continue 'em in holiness.' Continuing in holiness and righteous-

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<sup>16</sup> Sufficient grace in Roman Catholic (RC) theology of grace is grace that, in contrast to efficacious grace, does not meet with adequate cooperation on the part of the recipient and hence fails to achieve the result for which it was bestowed. The Reformers found this notion not only inconsistent but reprehensible. In the Dominican view (represented by the Thomist theologian of Salamanca, Domingo Banez (1528-1604)), it required further divine motion (efficacious grace) to produce its intended result. On the other hand, the Jesuit view, Molinism (represented by the Spanish theologian, Luis de Molina (1535-1600)), held that 'sufficient grace' was really adequate to produce such an intended result, needing only the consent of human free will to become efficacious. Within RC theology, both sufficient and efficacious graces are different forms of 'actual grace'. Molina's system was published in his *Concordia liberi arbitrii cum gractiae donis* (1588) and was widely adopted by the Jesuits. However, conservative RC theologians, especially the Dominicans led by Banez, immediately assailed it. The result was one of the most extensive theological controversies in RC theology, culminating in the *Congregatio de Auxiliis*. The *Congregatio*, which met for 120 sessions from 1598-1607, was unable to harmonize party differences, and Paul V dismissed the gathering undecided.



ness or the exercising of the principle of divine love, then, was also the effect of the power of God; and if the effect of the power of God in man, then there must have been a sort of coercion. Because Edwards identifies the supernatural principles with the Holy Spirit, the denial of coercion does not resonate with him. For, according to Edwards, God is not glorified through man's *independent* obedience, but in and through his relational *dependence* upon God, and specifically, the indwelling Spirit 'both to will and to do of His good pleasure.'<sup>17</sup> In Edwards, all the good and virtue that humanity may have is through God:

That he is the *cause* and original when all their good comes, therein it is *of* him; and that he is the *medium* by which it is obtained and conveyed, therein they have it *through* him; and that however is the *good itself* given and conveyed, therein they are *in* him.<sup>18</sup>

By calling for a degree of coercion in the first man, indeed, in regenerate persons as well, Edwards safeguards the glory of God, reserving all the motions of true virtue—even original and continual righteousness and innocence—to the arbitrary operations of God Himself.

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<sup>17</sup> Phil. 2:1 (1748/9), 'DOC. Divine love is a[n] ... inward principle and spring of religion in the soul.'

<sup>18</sup> *Works*17, 204.



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